

# 1 Introduction

Welcome! My name is Brandon Sanderson. Before anything else, I'd like to thank you for your interest in my books. I hope you enjoy *Warbreaker*.

In case you don't know, I'm a professional fantasy novelist. My first book, *Elantris*, was published in some thirteen languages, earned me a Campbell nomination, and got starred reviews in *Publisher's Weekly* and the *Library Journal*. It was also picked by Barnes and Noble editors as the best fantasy or science fiction book of the year.

My second book, *Mistborn*, is out in paperback. *Mistborn 2: The Well of Ascension* was published in August of 2007. Book three is out in October of this year. I also have a kid's book *Alcatraz versus the Evil Librarians* out from Scholastic Press. You can find sample chapters of these books at the end of this file. If you like *Warbreaker*, consider buying those!

As many of you might already know, I was chosen in December of 2007 to complete Robert Jordan's epic masterpiece *The Wheel of Time*. I'm hard at work on the twelfth and final novel in this series, titled *A MEMORY OF LIGHT*. It should be out sometime in the fall of 2009. Coincidentally, that should be the same year *Warbreaker* is released.

## How this Book Came About

*Warbreaker* is something of an experiment for me. For a long time, I've wanted to release an e-book on my website. My first inclination was to grab one of my old, unpublished books and offer it.

And yet, one of my main reasons for releasing said e-book would be for publicity reasons. I wanted something I could give away for free which would show what I'm capable of writing and therefore (hopefully) encourage people to look into my other books. I figure that if people give my books a try, they'll be hooked and read the other ones.

That made me want to offer something new. Something that showed off the very best of my abilities. Why offer an inferior product as your free sample? If it wasn't good enough to get published on its own, then wouldn't that lead people to think of my books as inferior?

That leads us to *Warbreaker*. This is not an old work. In fact, this is my newest work. It has been purchased by Tor (who gave me permission to try this experiment) and will be published in hardcover in 2009, with a paperback release to follow the next year.

I like to have a lot of contact with my fans, and as I contemplated releasing a new book (rather than an old one) on my website, I had a chance to do

something rarely seen. I could release drafts of the book *as I wrote them*, allowing my readers to catch a glimpse of the writing process. They could see the evolution of the book, maybe even offer feedback on early drafts, allowing them to have a much closer connection to me as a writer and this book in specific. By doing this, I could make *Warbreakera* a project which would engage my already existing readers as well as people who'd never tried my books before.

I decided to go ahead and give this a try. That was back in June of 2006.

My Worries

Releasing the book this way is a gamble for two reasons.

First off, there's the perennial fear that I think all artists get when they give away their art for free. A part of me worries that by giving this book away, it will end up selling dreadfully when it's actually released. Poor sales like that on one book (even a 10

I don't think this is likely. I, personally, feel very differently about art and the public than certain record executives appear to feel. I think that people WILL pay money for something they've already read if they liked it enough. They can always get books for free via the library anyway. Besides, I'm not trying to recruit people to buy one book; I'm trying to recruit lifelong fans who will still be reading Brandon Sanderson novels twenty years from now.

On top of all that, I believe that releasing at least one novel for free will bring my work to many readers who wouldn't otherwise be familiar with my work. The potential gains far outweigh the potential losses.

Still, I worry a little bit. But artists tend to do that.

The second fear I have relates not to releasing a work on-line, but releasing an *Unfinished* work on line. Though this is the fourth draft of the book, my novels usually see somewhere near eight drafts before they go to press. This is still a work in progress. What if readers pick this up, read through it, and judge me flawed as a writer because their only experience with me comes from an unpolished work?

This one really bothers my agent. He's got a good point. Still, I think the opportunity that this affords my readers—particularly the aspiring writers among them—was too great to ignore. It is done, and I intend to stick to my original plan. I will post every draft as I complete them, then will eventually post comparisons of the drafts so that readers can follow the changes made to the book.

Know, however, that this is *still a work in progress*. Don't judge me too harshly based on its flaws.

## Conclusion

My hope is still to let readers collaborate a little bit on this book. Feel free to visit my forums and email me with your impressions of the novel. Your feelings and questions are important to me and can help this book grow better.

I hope that you enjoy this book. If you do, the best thing you can do to say thanks would be to purchase a copy when it is released! (It's looking like Spring 2009.) You are also welcome to share it with friends (see the rights explanation below.)

Remember my published novels as well. They are far more polished, and if you want to make certain that I write more fantasy novels in the future, the best thing to do is indicate your will to Tor by purchasing my novels. You can find sample chapters of each of my published works at the end of this document. If you're reading in Microsoft Word, you can use the Document Map to jump to them. (Or to jump between chapters of WARBREAKER.) Using this, you can also find a list of revisions (spoiler warning!) that were made in this draft.

Most of all, I want to thank you for reading. I think the primary motivation of all artists is the desire to express themselves. My books are not complete until you read them and add your imagination to the events they contain. For me, sales are secondary to that.

Enjoy.

Brandon Sanderson, January 2008

## 2 Rights Explanation

In a more specific explanation, this means that:

1) You are free to share this book with anyone you like, provided you don't change the document at all or profit from the distribution.

2) You may print off copies of the book for personal use, but—again—may not profit from doing so.

3) You may not change the text of the work in any way, or imply that you wrote the book, or anything of that nature.

4) There is a no derivative works clause on this, since I don't want people adding chapters to the end or altering the work. However, I provide an exemption for fan art, provided you do not attach it to the document and clearly explain that the art is not mine or related officially to the project.

5) I also provide an exemption for fanfics, provided that—again—you do not attach them to this work or imply they are my work. In addition, by writing a fanfic that uses these characters, this magic, or that is related to this work in any way, you waive all rights to that work. (In other words, you can't write a *Warbreaker* fanfic, then sue me for compensation if I happen to write something similar in a sequel. I'm not going to steal your ideas, but I've got to write something like this just in case. It's every author's nightmare to get sued for writing in their own worlds, and is one of the reasons so many of them are so afraid of fanfiction.)

6) The above also holds for any feedback or suggestions you give me regarding this work on my forums. By offering feedback, you waive all rights to those suggestions and waive all rights to compensation for your help. I love to get feedback, and it's one of the reasons why I decided to post these chapters online as I wrote them. However, don't sue me if I actually decide to take some of your suggestions!

Brandon Sanderson June 2009

### 3 Acknowledgements

Working on *Warbreaker* was an unusual process in some ways; you can read more about it on my website. Suffice it to say that I had a more varied pool of alpha readers than normally, many of whom I know primarily through their handles on my forums. I've tried to get everyone's names in here, but I'm sure I'm going to miss some. If you are one of those individuals, feel free to email me, and we'll try to get you in future printings.

The first acknowledgment goes to my lovely wife, Emily Sanderson, whom I married while writing this book. This is the first novel of mine that she had a large hand in by giving me feedback and suggestions, and her help is greatly appreciated. Also, as always, my agent, Joshua Bilmes, and my editor, Moshe Feder, did an extremely large amount of work on this manuscript, taking it from the Second or Third Heightening to at least the Eighth.

At Tor, several people have gone well beyond their call of duty. The first is Dot Lin, my publicist, who has been particularly awesome to work with. Thanks, Dot! And, as always, the tireless efforts of Larry Yoder deserve a note, as well as the excellent work of Tor's art director genius, Irene Gallo. Dan Dos Santos did the cover art of this book, and I strongly suggest you check out his website and his other work, because I think he's one of the best in the business right now. Also, Paul Stevens deserves a word of thanks for being the in-house liaison for my books.

In the special thanks department, we have Joevans3, and Dreamking47, Louise Simard, Jeff Creer, Megan Kauffman, thelsdj, Megan Hutchins, Izzy Whiting, Janci Olds, Drew Olds, Karla Bennion, Eric James Stone, Dan Wells, Isaac Stewart, Ben Olsen, Greyhound, Demented Yam, D.Demille, Loryn, Kuntry Bumpken, Vadia, U-boat, Tjaeden, Dragon Fly, pterath, BarbaraJ, Shir Hasirim, Digitalbias, Spink Longfellow, amyface, Richard "Captain Goradel" Gordon, Swiggly, Dawn Cawley, Drerio, David B, Mi'chelle Trammel, Matthew R Carlin, Ollie Tabooger, John Palmer, Henrik Nyh, and the insoluble Peter Ahlstrom.

## 4 Prologue

*It's funny,* Vasher thought, *how many things begin with my getting thrown into prison.*

The guards laughed to one another, slamming the cell door shut with a clang. Vasher stood and dusted himself off, rolling his shoulder and wincing. While the bottom half of his cell door was solid wood, the top half was barred, and he could see the three guards open his large duffel and rifle through his possessions.

One of them noticed him watching. The guard was an oversized beast of a man with a shaved head and a dirty uniform that barely retained the bright yellow and blue coloring of the T'Telir city guard.

*Bright colors,* Vasher thought. *I'll have to get used to those again.* In any other nation, the vibrant blues and yellows would have been ridiculous on soldiers. This, however, was Hallandren: land of Returned gods, Lifeless servants, BioChromatic research, and—of course—color.

The large guard sauntered up to the cell door, leaving his friends to amuse themselves with Vasher's belongings. "They say you're pretty tough," the man said, sizing up Vasher.

Vasher did not respond.

"The bartender says you beat down some twenty men in the brawl." The guard rubbed his chin. "You don't look that tough to me. Either way, you should have known better than to strike a priest. The others, they'll spend a night locked up. You, though . . . you'll hang. Colorless fool."

Vasher turned away. His cell was functional, if unoriginal. A thin slit at the top of one wall let in light, the stone walls dripped with water and moss, and a pile of dirty straw decomposed in the corner.

"You ignoring me?" the guard asked, stepping closer to the door. The colors of his uniform brightened, as if he'd stepped into a stronger light. The change was slight. Vasher didn't have much Breath remaining, and so his aura didn't do much to the colors around him. The guard didn't notice the change in color—just as he hadn't noticed back in the bar, when he and his buddies had picked Vasher up off the floor and thrown him in their cart. Of course, the change was so slight to the unaided eye that it would have been nearly impossible to pick out.

"Here, now," said one of the men looking through Vasher's duffel. "What's *this*?" Vasher had always found it interesting that the men who watched dungeons tended to be as bad as, or worse than, the men they guarded. Perhaps that

was deliberate. Society didn't seem to care if such men were outside the cells or in them, so long as they were kept away from more honest men.

Assuming that such a thing existed.

From Vasher's bag, a guard pulled free a long object wrapped in white linen. The man whistled as he unwrapped the cloth, revealing a long, thin-bladed sword in a silver sheath. The hilt was pure black. "Who do you suppose he stole *this* from?"

The lead guard eyed Vasher, likely wondering if Vasher was some kind of nobleman. Though Hallandren had no aristocracy, many neighboring kingdoms had their lords and ladies. Yet what lord would wear a drab brown cloak, ripped in several places? What lord would sport bruises from a bar fight, a half-grown beard, and boots worn from years of walking? The guard turned away, apparently convinced that Vasher was no lord.

He was right. And he was wrong.

"Let me see that," the lead guard said, taking the sword. He grunted, obviously surprised by its weight. He turned it about, noting the clasp that tied sheath to hilt, keeping the blade from being drawn. He undid the clasp.

The colors in the room deepened. They didn't grow brighter—not the way the guard's vest had when he approached Vasher. Instead, they grew *stronger*. Darker. Reds became maroon. Yellows hardened to gold. Blues approached navy.

"Be careful, friend," Vasher said softly, "that sword can be dangerous."

The guard looked up. All was still. Then the guard snorted and walked away from Vasher's cell, still carrying the sword. The other two followed, bearing Vasher's duffel, entering the guard room at the end of the hallway.

The door thumped shut. Vasher immediately knelt beside the patch of straw, selecting a handful of sturdy lengths. He pulled threads from his cloak—it was beginning to fray at the bottom—and tied the straw into the shape of a small person, perhaps three inches high, with bushy arms and legs. He plucked a hair from one of his eyebrows, set it against the straw figure's head, then reached into his boot and pulled out a brilliant red scarf.

Then Vasher Breathed.

It flowed out of him, puffing into the air, translucent yet radiant, like the color of oil on water in the sun. Vasher felt it leave: BioChromatic Breath, scholars called it. Most people just called it Breath. Each person had one. Or, at least, that was how it usually went. One person, one Breath.

Vasher had around fifty Breaths, just enough to reach the First Heightening. Having so few made him feel poor compared with what he'd once held, but many would consider fifty Breaths to be a great treasure. Unfortunately,

even Awakening a small figure made from organic material—using a piece of his own body as a focus—drained away some half of his Breaths.

The little straw figure jerked, sucking in the Breath. In Vasher’s hand, half of the brilliant red scarf faded to grey. Vasher leaned down—imagining what he wanted the figure to do—and completed the final step of the process as he gave the Command.

“Fetch keys,” he said.

The straw figure stood and raised its single eyebrow toward Vasher.

Vasher pointed toward the guard room. From it, he heard sudden shouts of surprise.

*Not much time*, he thought.

The straw person ran along the floor, then jumped up, vaulting between the bars. Vasher pulled off his cloak and set it on the floor. It was the perfect shape of a person—marked with rips that matched the scars on Vasher’s body, its hood cut with holes to match Vasher’s eyes. The closer an object was to human shape and form, the fewer Breaths it took to Awaken.

Vasher leaned down, trying not to think of the days when he’d had enough Breaths to Awaken without regard for shape or focus. That had been a different time. Wincing, he pulled a tuft of hair from his head, then sprinkled it across the hood of the cloak.

Once again, he Breathed.

It took the rest of his Breath. With it gone—the cloak trembling, the scarf losing the rest of its color—Vasher felt . . . dimmer. Losing one’s Breath was not fatal. Indeed, the extra Breaths Vasher used had once belonged to other people. Vasher didn’t know who they were; he hadn’t gathered these Breaths himself. They had been given to him. But, of course, that was the way it was always supposed to work. One could not take Breath by force.

Being void of Breath *did* change him. Colors didn’t seem as bright. He couldn’t *feel* the bustling people moving about in the city above, a connection he normally took for granted. It was the awareness all men had for others—that thing which whispered a warning, in the drowsiness of sleep, when someone entered the room. In Vasher, that sense had been magnified fifty times.

And now it was gone. Sucked into the cloak and the straw person, giving them power.

The cloak jerked. Vasher leaned down. “Protect me,” he Commanded, and the cloak grew still. He stood, throwing it back on.

The straw figure returned to his window. It carried a large ring of keys.



The figure's straw feet were stained red. The crimson blood seemed so dull to Vasher now.

He took the keys. "Thank you," he said. He always thanked them. He didn't know why, particularly considering what he did next. "Your Breath to mine," he commanded, touching the straw person's chest. The straw person immediately fell backward off the door—life draining from it—and Vasher got his Breath back. The familiar sense of awareness returned, the knowledge of connectedness, of *fitting*. He could only take the Breath back because he'd Awakened this creature himself—indeed, Awakenings of this sort were rarely permanent. He used his Breath like a reserve, doling it out, then recovering it.

Compared with what he had once held, twenty-five Breaths was a laughably small number. However, compared with nothing, it seemed infinite. He shivered in satisfaction.

The yells from the guard room died out. The dungeon fell still. He had to keep moving.

Vasher reached through the bars, using the keys to unlock his cell. He pushed the thick door open, rushing out into the hallway, leaving the straw figure discarded on the ground. He didn't walk to the guard room—and the exit beyond it—but instead turned south, penetrating deeper into the dungeon.

This was the most uncertain part of his plan. Finding a tavern that was frequented by priests of the Iridescent Tones had been easy enough. Getting into a bar fight—then striking one of those same priests—had been equally simple. Hallandren took their religious figures very seriously, and Vasher had earned himself not the usual imprisonment in a local jail, but a trip to the God King's dungeons.

Knowing the kind of men who tended to guard such dungeons, he'd had a pretty good idea that they would try to draw Nightblood. That had given him the diversion he'd needed to get the keys.

But now came the unpredictable part.

Vasher stopped, Awakened cloak rustling. It was easy to locate the cell he wanted, for around it a large patch of stone had been drained of color, leaving both walls and doors a dull grey. It was a place to imprison an Awakener, for no color meant no Awakening. Vasher stepped up to the door, looking through the bars. A man hung by his arms from the ceiling, naked and chained. His color was vibrant to Vasher's eyes, his skin a pure tan, his bruises brilliant splashes of blue and violet.

The man was gagged. Another precaution. In order to Awaken, the man would need three things: Breath, color, and a Command. The harmonics and the hues, some called it. The Iridescent Tones, the relationship between color and sound. A Command had to be spoken clearly and firmly in the Awakener's native language—any stuttering, any mispronunciation, would invalidate the Awakening. The Breath would be drawn out, but the object would be unable to act.

Vasher used the prison keys to unlock the cell door, then stepped inside. This man's aura made colors grow brighter by sharp measure when they got close to him. Anyone would be able to notice an aura that strong, though it was much easier for someone who had reached the First Heightening.

It wasn't the strongest BioChromatic aura Vasher had ever seen—those belonged to the Returned, known as gods here in Hallandren. Still, the prisoner's BioChroma was very impressive and much, much stronger than Vasher's own. The prisoner held a lot of Breaths. Hundreds upon hundreds of them.

The man swung in his bonds, studying Vasher, gagged lips bleeding from lack of water. Vasher hesitated only briefly, then reached up and pulled the gag free.

"You," the prisoner whispered, coughing slightly. "Are you here to free me?"

"No, Vahr," Vasher said quietly. "I'm here to kill you."

Vahr snorted. Captivity hadn't been easy on him. When Vasher had last seen Vahr, he'd been plump. Judging by his emaciated body, he'd been without food for some time now. The cuts, bruises, and burn marks on his flesh were fresh.

Both the torture and the haunted look in Vahr's bag-rimmed eyes bespoke a solemn truth. Breath could only be transferred by willing, intentional Command. That Command could, however, be encouraged.

"So," Vahr croaked, "you judge me, just like everyone else."

"Your failed rebellion is not my concern. I just want your Breath."

"You and the entire Hallandren court."

"Yes. But you're not going to give it to one of the Returned. You're going to give it to me. In exchange for killing you."

"Doesn't seem like much of a trade." There was a hardness—a void of emotion—in Vahr that Vasher had not seen the last time they had parted, years before.

*Odd, Vasher thought, that I should finally, after all of this time, find something in the man that I can identify with.*

Vasher kept a wary distance from Vahr. Now that the man's voice was free, he could Command. However, he was touching nothing except for the metal chains, and metal was very difficult to Awaken. It had never been alive, and it was far from the form of a man. Even during the height of his power, Vasher himself had only managed to Awaken metal on a few select occasions. Of course, some extremely powerful Awakeners could bring objects to life that they weren't touching, but that were in the sound of their voice. That, however, required the Ninth Heightening. Even Vahr didn't have *that* much Breath. In fact, Vasher knew of only one living person who did: the God King himself.

That meant Vasher was probably safe. Vahr contained a great wealth of Breath, but had nothing to Awaken. Vasher walked around the chained man, finding it very difficult to offer any sympathy. Vahr had earned his fate. Yet the priests would not let him die while he held so much Breath; if he died, it would be wasted. Gone. Irretrievable.

Not even the government of Hallandren—which had such strict laws about the buying and passing of Breath—could let such a treasure slip away. They wanted it badly enough to forestall the execution of even a high-profile criminal like Vahr. In retrospect, they would curse themselves for not leaving him better guarded.

But, then, Vasher had been waiting two years for an opportunity like this one.

"Well?" Vahr asked.

"Give me the Breath, Vahr," Vasher said, stepping forward.

Vahr snorted. "I doubt you have the skill of the God King's torturers, Vasher—and I've withstood them for two weeks now."

"You'd be surprised. But that doesn't matter. You *are* going to give me your Breath. You know you have only two choices. Give it to me, or give it to them."

Vahr hung by his wrists, rotating slowly. Silent.

"You don't have much time to consider," Vasher said. "Any moment now, someone is going to discover the dead guards outside. The alarm will be raised. I'll leave you, you *will* be tortured again, and you *will* eventually break. Then all the power you've gathered will go to the very people you vowed to destroy."

Vahr stared at the floor. Vasher let him hang for a few moments, and

could see that the reality of the situation was clear to him. Finally, Vahr looked up at Vasher. “That . . . thing you bear. It’s here, in the city?”

Vasher nodded.

“The screams I heard earlier? It caused them?”

Vasher nodded again.

“How long will you be in T’Telir?”

“For a time. A year, perhaps.”

“Will you use it against them?”

“My goals are my own to know, Vahr. Will you take my deal or not? Quick death in exchange for those Breaths. I promise you this. Your enemies will *not* have them.”

Vahr grew quiet. “It’s yours,” he finally whispered.

Vasher reached over, resting his hand on Vahr’s forehead—careful not to let any part of his clothing touch the man’s skin, lest Vahr draw forth color for Awakening.

Vahr didn’t move. He looked numb. Then, just as Vasher began to worry that the prisoner had changed his mind, Vahr Breathed. The color drained from him. The beautiful Iridescence, the aura that had made him look majestic despite his wounds and chains. It flowed from his mouth, hanging in the air, shimmering like mist. Vasher drew it in, closing his eyes.

“My life to yours,” Vahr Commanded, a hint of despair in his voice. “My Breath become yours.”

The Breath flooded into Vasher, and everything became vibrant. His brown cloak now seemed deep and rich in color. The blood on the floor was intensely red, as if aflame. Even Vahr’s skin seemed a masterpiece of color, the surface marked by deep black hairs, blue bruises, and sharp red cuts. It had been years since Vasher had felt such . . . *life*.

He gasped, falling to his knees as it overwhelmed him, and he had to drop a hand to the stone floor to keep himself from toppling over. *How did I live without this?*

He knew that his senses hadn’t actually improved, yet he felt so much more alert. More aware of the beauty of sensation. When he touched the stone floor, he marveled at its roughness. And the sound of wind passing through the thin dungeon window up above. Had it always been that melodic? How could he not have noticed?

“Keep your part of the bargain,” Vahr said. Vasher noted the tones in his voice, the beauty of each one, how close they were to harmonics. Vasher had

gained perfect pitch. A gift for anyone who reached the Second Heightening. It would be good to have that again.

Vasher could, of course, have up to the Fifth Heightening at any time, if he wished. That would require certain sacrifices he wasn't willing to make. And so he forced himself to do it the old-fashioned way, by gathering Breaths from people like Vahr.

Vasher stood, then pulled out the colorless scarf he had used earlier. He tossed it over Vahr's shoulder, then Breathed.

He didn't bother making the scarf have human shape, didn't need to use a bit of his hair or skin for a focus—though he did have to draw the color from his shirt.

Vasher met Vahr's resigned eyes.

"Strangle things," Vasher Commanded, fingers touching the quivering scarf.

It twisted immediately, pulling away a large—yet now inconsequential—amount of Breath. The scarf quickly wrapped around Vahr's neck, tightening, choking him. Vahr didn't struggle or gasp; he simply watched Vasher with hatred until his eyes bulged and he died.

Hatred. Vasher had known enough of that in his time. He quietly reached up and recovered his Breath from the scarf, then left Vahr dangling in his cell. Vasher passed quietly through the prison, marveling at the color of the woods and the stones. After a few moments of walking, he noticed a new color in the hallway. Red.

He stepped around the pool of blood—which was seeping down the inclined dungeon floor—and moved into the guard room. The three guards lay dead. One of them sat in a chair. Nightblood, still mostly sheathed, had been rammed through the man's chest. About an inch of a dark black blade was visible beneath the silver sheath.

Vasher carefully slid the weapon fully back into its sheath. He did up the clasp.

*I did very well today,* a voice said in his mind.

Vasher didn't respond to the sword.

*I killed them all,* Nightblood continued. *Aren't you proud of me?*

Vasher picked up the weapon, accustomed to its unusual weight, and carried it in one hand. He recovered his duffel and slung it over his shoulder.

*I knew you'd be impressed,* Nightblood said, sounding satisfied.

## 5 Annotation Prologue

### The Origins of the Prologue

This began as a first chapter; I only later turned it into the prologue. My worry when I made the change (and it's still a bit of a worry) was that it was kind of a sneaky way to begin the book. Let me explain.

This novel focuses primarily on Siri, Vivenna, and Lightsong. Vasher, as the fourth viewpoint, is only in there fairly sparsely. True, he drives a lot of what is happening from behind the scenes, but he's a mysterious figure, and we don't know a lot about him. This prologue is pretty much the most extensive, lengthy, and in-depth scene we get of him.

Therefore, it's kind of sneaky to begin the book with him. I did it for a couple of reasons. First off—and this is the most important one—this scene is just a great hook. It shows off the magic system and the setting of the novel (most of the action takes place in T'Telir, even though the first few chapters are over in Idris). It's full of conflict and tension, with a mysterious character doing interesting things. In short, it's exactly how you want to begin a book.

My worries aren't about this prologue so much as they are about the following three chapters, where things slow down a lot. I was tempted to cut this scene and put it in later, but I eventually decided that giving it the mantle of a prologue was enough. A lot of times, particularly in fantasy, we writers use a prologue to highlight a character or conflict that might not show up again for a while.

### Naming Vasher

Vasher's name has interesting origins. I first began toying with the ideas that became *Warbreaker* back in 2005. I was hanging out with my then girlfriend (not Emily, but Heather, the girl I dated before I met Emily). We were up at Heather's family's cabin in Island Park, Idaho, and I had just met her father for the first time. His name was Vance.

The name intrigued me. Yes, I'd heard it before, but for some reason at that moment it struck me. Later that day, sitting on the dock of the lake, I pulled out my notebook and began to play around with ideas for a story. I tweaked the name to Vancer, but that just didn't sound right, though I used it for a while. The next incarnation was Vasher. [*Editor's note: Brandon had*

*earlier used the name Vasher in 2003 for a different character in the draft of another novel, but he had completely forgotten that by the time he wrote this annotation.]*

I began doing some preliminary prose writing, plugging in a magic system I'd been working on. (I'll talk more later about how I came up with Awakening.) It became a story about a guy who was thrown into prison, then used his Awakening magic to get out of it. (Along with the help of his longtime sidekick, whose name escapes me right now.)

It wasn't very long. I'll have to dig it out sometime—it's only handwritten and wasn't something I ever intended to publish. Just a quick character sketch. It did have the first line, however, of what eventually became this book: "Why does it always have to end up with me getting thrown into prison?"

## **First Line Origins**

Of course, this line got a tweak of its own in later drafts. I was fond of this first line, as I'd used it in the original short story with Vancer. However, in that story, he'd been thrown into prison for other reasons. In *Warbreaker*, I began the book with Vasher getting himself purposefully tossed into prison.

So, in the end, my editor pointed out that the line no longer worked quite right. We had to change it—why would Vasher complain about getting thrown into prison if he had done it to himself on purpose? So, it became "It's funny how many things begin with my getting thrown into prison."

## 6 Annotation Prologue Part 2

There are a couple of other relics from the original short story version of this chapter that made it into the final book. I toyed with cutting these, but figured that there were good reasons for them.

### The Guard Approaches, and His Clothing Becomes Brighter

This is an essential part of the magic system. When you get close to someone's aura, their clothing—and everything else about them—brightens in color slightly. It's important to show it in this prologue.

Unfortunately, it also shouldn't be there. You see, Vasher should be smart enough to hide his Breath in his clothing, as the book later shows is quite easy to do. He shouldn't have left himself holding any Breath. It's suspicious. If those guards *had* noticed his aura—or if someone working in the prison had been of the First Heightening—Vasher would have been spotted. It's such an easy fix that he should have thought of it.

The problem is, I felt I needed to establish the way the magic works from the beginning. Having to explain why Vasher didn't make the clothing glow would have been awkward and confusing at this point in the book. So I left this as it is.

However, being who I am, I developed a background for why Vasher did it this way. He left his Breath in, and thought that maybe it *would* be noticed—but if it was, he knew that the guards would lock him in a cell much closer to Vahr. That would be convenient, as it would ensure that he was much closer to his quarry. Of course, in such a cell, he wouldn't be able to Awaken anything and escape. However, he'd planned for that too. He set a little straw figure outside the prison the night before, with specific Commands instructing it to search through the cells and find him, delivering a set of lock picks.

It was risky—but either way he did it would be risky. He couldn't know for certain that the guards would take him to the area he needed to be in, and even if he *had* hidden his Breath in his clothing, some prisons have rules in place requiring each prisoner to be stripped, just in case they've done just that. Fortunately, these guards were particularly lazy. Anyway, Vasher's contingency plan wasn't needed, as the guards didn't end up noticing his Breath.



## Vasher Awakens the Straw Figure

I love how intricate and delicate Vasher is in creating the straw figure. The little eyebrow is a nice touch, and forming the creature into the shape of a person has a nice resonance with our own world's superstitions.

Voodoo dolls, for instance. This is very common in tribal magics and shamanistic rituals—something in the figure of a person, or the figure of the thing it's supposed to affect, is often seen as being more powerful or more desirable. The same is said for having a drop of blood or a tiny piece of skin, even a piece of hair.

Those two things—making the doll in the shape of a man and using a bit of his own body as a focus—are supposed to create instant resonance in the magic for those reading it. I think it works, too. Unfortunately, there's a problem with this, much like with the colors above. In later chapters, the characters are generally powerful enough with the magic that they don't *have* to make things in human shape or use pieces of their own body as a focus.

If I were to write a sequel to the book (and I just might—more on this later) I'd want to get back to these two aspects of the magic. Talk about them more, maybe have characters who have smaller quantities of Breath, and so need to use these tricks to make their Awakening more powerful.

Anyway, this little scene threw all kinds of problems into the book. Later on, I had to decide if I wanted to force the characters to always make things into the shape of a person before Awakening them. That proved impossible, it was *too* limiting on the magic and interfered with action sequences. The same was true for using bits of their own flesh as focuses. It just didn't work.

I toyed with cutting these things from the prologue. (Again, they are artifacts from the short story I wrote, back when Awakening wasn't fully developed yet.) However, I like the resonance they give, and think they add a lot of depth to the magic system.

So I made them optional. They're things that you *can* do to make your Awakenings require fewer Breaths. That lets me have them for resonance, but not talk about them when I don't need them. I still worry that they set up false expectations for the magic, however.

## 7 Annotation Prologue Part 3

What else to say about the prologue? I'll talk about Nightblood in a future annotation. Let's see . . .

### Vasher Awakens the Cloak

He doesn't end up using it. A lot of people point this out. Him not needing it was intentional. I know it raises a question in the prologue, and seems kind of useless, but it's there to give some added depth to the scene and the magic. Plus, it was just a smart thing to do. Awakening the cloak to protect him was a precaution—one that didn't end up being needed, but one of the things that annoys me about books is when every single thing the heroes do ends up being important, useful, or even a hindrance. Sometimes you pack yourself a lunch, but then just don't end up needing it.

### The Straw Figure Returns with the Keys

Vasher couldn't have used a thread to unlock the door here, by the way. I know a certain person manages to pull it off later in the book, but that doesn't happen in the God King's dungeons.

One thing to remember about designing magic systems—particularly those as important to their societies as mine—is that the people in the world *live* with this magic. They use it and see it being used regularly. They think of it and consider it.

It's not hard to design a lock that an Awakened thread can't unlock easily. It *is* more expensive to buy a lock like that, and so not all locks have such precautions. These ones do, however.

If you've read the book through, then you know that Vasher's simple-sounding Command of "Fetch Keys" given to the straw man is incredibly complex. In fact, it's probably one of the most complicated Commands given to any Awakened object in the entire book. It's kind of cool to me that Vasher uses it here, showing off incredible mastery of the magic, before anyone reading will even realize how much skill saying those two words correctly really takes.

## Vasher Confronts Vahr

Vahr's original name was Pahn. You can find it used in earlier drafts of the book. I liked the sound and look of that so much, in fact, that I based the name of the people he came from on his own name.

That made for a problem, though. That's like having a person named America. It happens, but it's kind of confusing in a book. So, I eventually had to change his name to something that had a similar look and feel, but which wouldn't lead to so much confusion.

Vahr dies here, and one of the major revisions I made to the book was to bring out more of his influence throughout the book. I didn't want it to be *too* in your face. However, he was a very important man. We see only the very tail end of his life here, but he worked for over a decade as a Pahn revolutionary, trying to inspire his people to rebel against Hallandren oppression. (Or at least what he saw as Hallandren oppression.) He eventually became such a popular figure that he raised an army, with monetary support from several of Hallandren's trade competitors across the sea.

We see here the end of that—Vahr, captured and being tortured. He's a lot more important than he seems, both to the world and to the novel itself.

Also, if you look, I've inputted in the last drafts a little hint here of Vasher being a Returned. He says he could have the Fifth Heightening if he wanted it, which is true. He has his Returned Breath suppressed, but if he let it out, he could instantly have the Fifth Heightening. However, he'd be instantly recognizable as Returned the moment he did that. Plus, he couldn't use that Returned Breath for Awakening things.

## 8 Chapter One

There were great advantages to being unimportant.

True, by many people's standards, Siri wasn't "unimportant." She was, after all, the daughter of a king. Fortunately, her father had four living children, and Siri—at seventeen years of age—was the youngest. Fafen, the daughter just older than Siri, had done the family duty and become a monk. Above Fafen was Ridger, the eldest son. He would inherit the throne.

And then there was Vivenna. Siri sighed as she walked down the path back to the city. Vivenna, the firstborn, was . . . well . . . Vivenna. Beautiful, poised, perfect in most every way. It was a good thing, too, considering the fact that she was betrothed to a god. Either way, Siri—as fourth child—was redundant. Vivenna and Ridger had to focus on their studies; Fafen had to do her work in the pastures and homes. Siri, however, could get away with being unimportant. That meant she could disappear into the wilderness for hours at a time.

People would notice, of course, and she *would* get into trouble. Yet even her father would have to admit that her disappearance hadn't caused much inconvenience. The city got along just fine without Siri—in fact, it tended to do a little better when she wasn't around.

Unimportance. To another, it might have been offensive. To Siri it was a blessing. She smiled, walking into the city proper. She drew the inevitable stares. While Bevalis was technically the capital of Idris, it wasn't that big, and everyone knew her by sight. Judging by the stories Siri had heard from passing ramblemen, her home was hardly even a village compared with the massive metropolises in other nations.

She liked it the way it was, even with the muddy streets, the thatched cottages, and the boring—yet sturdy—stone walls. Women chasing runaway geese, men pulling donkeys laden with spring seed, and children leading sheep on their way to pasture. A grand city in Xaka, Hudres, or even terrible Hallandren might have exotic sights, but it would be crowded with faceless, shouting, jostling crowds, and haughty noblemen. Not Siri's preference; she generally found even Bevalis to be a bit busy for her.

*Still*, she thought, looking down at her utilitarian grey dress, *I'll bet those cities have more colors. That's something I might like to see.*

Her hair wouldn't stand out so much there. As usual, the long locks had gone blond with joy while she'd been out in the fields. She concentrated, trying to rein them in, but she was only able to bring the color to a dull

brown. As soon as she stopped focusing, her hair just went back to the way it had been. She'd never been very good at controlling it. Not like Vivenna.

As she continued through the town, a group of small figures began trailing her. She smiled, pretending to ignore the children until one of them was brave enough to run forward and tug on her dress. Then she turned, smiling. They regarded her with solemn faces. Idrian children were trained even at this age to avoid shameful outbursts of emotion. Austrin teachings said there was nothing wrong with feelings, but drawing attention to yourself with them was wrong.

Siri had never been very devout. It wasn't her fault, she reasoned, if Austre had made her with a distinct inability to obey. The children waited patiently until Siri reached into her apron and pulled out a couple of brightly colored flowers. The children's eyes opened wide, gazing at the vibrant colors. Three of the flowers were blue, one yellow.

The flowers stood out starkly against the town's determined drabness. Other than what one could find in the skin and eyes of the people, there wasn't a drop of color in sight. Stones had been whitewashed, clothing bleached grey or tan. All to keep the color away.

For without color, there could be no Awakeners.

The girl who had tugged Siri's skirt finally took the flowers in one hand and dashed away with them, the other children following behind. Siri caught a look of disapproval in the eyes of several passing villagers. None of them confronted her, though. Being a princess—even an unimportant one—did have its perks.

She continued on toward the palace. It was a low, single-story building with a large, packed-earth courtyard. Siri avoided the crowds of haggling people at the front, rounding to the back and going in the kitchen entrance. Mab, the kitchen mistress, stopped singing as the door opened, then eyed Siri.

"Your father's been looking for you, child," Mab said, turning away and humming as she attacked a pile of onions.

"I suspect that he has." Siri walked over and sniffed at a pot, which bore the calm scent of boiling potatoes.

"Went to the hills again, didn't you? Skipped your tutorial sessions, I'll bet."

Siri smiled, then pulled out another of the bright yellow flowers, spinning it between two fingers.

Mab rolled her eyes. "And been corrupting the city youth again, I suspect."

Honestly, girl, you should be beyond these things at your age. Your father will have words with you about shirking your responsibilities.”

“I like words,” Siri said. “And I always learn a few new ones when Father gets angry. I shouldn’t neglect my education, now should I?”

Mab snorted, dicing some pickled cucumbers into the onions.

“Honestly, Mab,” Siri said, twirling the flower, feeling her hair shade a little bit red. “I don’t see what the problem is. Austre made the flowers, right? He put the colors on them, so they can’t be evil. I mean, we call him God of Colors, for heaven’s sake.”

“Flowers ain’t evil,” Mab said, adding something that looked like grass to her concoction, “assuming they’re left where Austre put them. We shouldn’t use Austre’s beauty to make ourselves more important.”

“A flower doesn’t make me look more important.”

“Oh?” Mab asked, adding the grass, cucumber, and onions to one of her boiling pots. She banged the side of the pot with the flat of her knife, listening, then nodded to herself and began fishing under the counter for more vegetables. “You tell me,” she continued, voice muffled. “You really think walking through the city with a flower like that didn’t draw attention to yourself?”

“That’s only because the city is so drab. If there were a bit of color around, nobody would notice a flower.”

Mab reappeared, hefting a box filled with various tubers. “You’d have us decorate the place like Hallandren? Maybe we should start inviting Awakeners into the city? How’d you like that? Some dev il sucking the souls out of children, strangling people with their own clothing? Bringing men back from the grave, then using their dead bodies for cheap labor? Sacrificing women on their unholy altars?”

Siri felt her hair whiten slightly with anxiety. *Stop that!* she thought. The hair seemed to have a mind of its own, responding to gut feelings.

“That sacrificing-maidens part is only a story,” Siri said. “They don’t really do that.”

“Stories come from somewhere.”

“Yes, they come from old women sitting by the hearth in the winter. I don’t think we need to be so frightened. The Hallandren will do what they want, which is fine by me, as long as they leave us alone.”

Mab chopped tubers, not looking up.

“We’ve got the treaty, Mab,” Siri said. “Father and Vivenna will make sure we’re safe, and that will make the Hallandren leave us alone.”

“And if they don’t?”

“They will. You don’t need to worry.”

“They have better armies,” Mab said, chopping, not looking up, “better steel, more food, and those . . . those *things*. It makes people worry. Maybe not *you*, but sensible folk.”

The cook’s words were hard to dismiss out of hand. Mab had a sense, a wisdom beyond her instinct for spices and broths. However, she *also* tended to fret. “You’re worrying about nothing, Mab. You’ll see.”

“I’m just saying that this is a bad time for a royal princess to be running around with flowers, standin’ out and inviting Austre’s dislike.”

Siri sighed. “Fine, then,” she said, tossing her last flower into the stewpot. “Now we can all stand out together.”

Mab froze, then rolled her eyes, chopping a root. “I assume that was a vanavel flower?”

“Of course,” Siri said, sniffing at the steaming pot. “I know better than to ruin a good stew. And I still say you’re overreacting.”

Mab sniffed. “Here,” she said, pulling out another knife. “Make yourself useful. There’s roots that need choppin’.”

“Shouldn’t I report to my father?” Siri said, grabbing a gnarled vanavel root and beginning to chop.

“He’ll just send you back here and make you work in the kitchens as a punishment,” Mab said, banging the pot with her knife again. She firmly believed that she could judge when a dish was done by the way the pot rang.

“Austre help me if Father ever discovers I like it down here.”

“You just like being close to the food,” Mab said, fishing Siri’s flower out of the stew, then tossing it aside. “Either way, you can’t report to him. He’s in conference with Yarda.”

Siri gave no reaction—she simply continued to chop. Her hair, however, grew blond with excitement. *Father’s conferences with Yarda usually last hours*, she thought. *Not much point in simply sitting around, waiting for him to get done. . . .*

Mab turned to get something off the table, and before she looked back, Siri bolted out the door on her way toward the royal stables. Bare minutes later, she galloped away from the palace, wearing her favorite brown cloak, feeling an exhilarated thrill that sent her hair into a deep blond. A nice quick ride would be a good way to round out the day.

After all, her punishment was likely to be the same either way.

Dedelin, king of Idris, set the letter down on his desk. He had stared at it long enough. It was time to decide whether or not to send his eldest daughter to her death.

Despite the advent of spring, his chamber was cold. Warmth was a rare thing in the Idris highlands; it was coveted and enjoyed, for it lingered only briefly each summer. The chambers were also stark. There was a beauty in simplicity. Even a king had no right to display arrogance by ostentation.

Dedelin stood up, looking out his window and into the courtyard. The palace was small by the world's standards—only a single story high, with a peaked wooden roof and squat stone walls. But it was large by Idrian standards, and it bordered on flamboyant. This could be forgiven, for the palace was also a meeting hall and center of operations for his entire kingdom.

The king could see General Yarda out of the corner of his eye. The burly man stood waiting, his hands clasped behind his back, his thick beard tied in three places. He was the only other person in the room.

Dedelin glanced back at the letter. The paper was a bright pink, and the garish color stood out on his desk like a drop of blood in the snow. Pink was a color one would never see in Idris. In Hallandren, however—center of the world's dye industry—such tasteless hues were commonplace.

“Well, old friend?” Dedelin asked. “Do you have any advice for me?”

General Yarda shook his head. “War is coming, Your Majesty. I feel it in the winds and read it in the reports of our spies. Hallandren still considers us rebels, and our passes to the north are too tempting. They will attack.”

“Then I shouldn't send her,” Dedelin said, looking back out his window. The courtyard bustled with people in furs and cloaks coming to market.

“We can't stop the war, Your Majesty,” Yarda said. “But . . . we can slow it.”

Dedelin turned back.

Yarda stepped forward, speaking softly. “This is not a good time. Our troops still haven't recovered from those Vendis raids last fall, and with the fires in the granary this winter . . .” Yarda shook his head. “We *cannot* afford to get into a defensive war in the summer. Our best ally against the Hallandren is the snow. We can't let this conflict occur on their terms. If we do, we are dead.”

The words all made sense.

“Your Majesty,” Yarda said, “they are *waiting* for us to break the treaty as an excuse to attack. If we move first, they will strike.”

“If we keep the treaty, they will *still* strike,” Dedelin said.



“But later. Perhaps months later. You know how slow Hallandren politics are. If we keep the treaty, there will be debates and arguments. If those last until the snows, then we will have gained the time we need so badly.”

It all made sense. Brutal, honest sense. All these years, Dedelin had stalled and watched as the Hallandren court grew more and more aggressive, more and more agitated. Every year, voices called for an assault on the “rebel Idrians” living up in the highlands. Every year, those voices grew louder and more plentiful. Every year, Dedelin’s placating and politics kept the armies away. He had hoped, perhaps, that the rebel leader Vahr and his Pahn Kahl dissidents would draw attention away from Idris, but Vahr had been captured, his so-called army dispersed. His actions had only served to make Hallandren more focused on its enemies.

The peace would not last. Not with Idris ripe, not with the trade routes worth so much. Not with the current crop of Hallandren gods, who seemed so much more erratic than their predecessors. He *knew* all of that. But he also knew that breaking the treaty would be foolish. When you were cast into the den of a beast, you did not provoke it to anger.

Yarda joined him beside the window, looking out, leaning one elbow against the side of the frame. He was a harsh man born of harsh winters. But he was also as good a man as Dedelin had ever known—a part of the king longed to marry Vivenna to the general’s own son.

That was foolishness. Dedelin had always known this day would come. He’d crafted the treaty himself, and it demanded he send his daughter to marry the God King. The Hallandren needed a daughter of the royal blood to reintroduce the traditional bloodline into their monarchy. It was something the depraved and vainglorious people of the lowlands had long coveted, and only that specific clause in the treaty had saved Idris these twenty years.

That treaty had been the first official act of Dedelin’s reign, negotiated furiously following his father’s assassination. Dedelin gritted his teeth. How quickly he’d bowed before the whims of his enemies. Yet he would do it again; an Idrian monarch would do anything for his people. That was one big difference between Idris and Hallandren.

“If we send her, Yarda,” Dedelin said, “we send her to her death.”

“Maybe they won’t harm her,” Yarda finally said.

“You know better than that. The first thing they’ll do when war comes is use her against me. This is *Hallandren*. They invite Awakeners into their palaces, for Austre’s sake!”

Yarda fell silent. Finally, he shook his head. “Latest reports say their

army has grown to include some forty thousand Lifeless.”

*Lord God of Colors*, Dedelin thought, glancing at the letter again. Its language was simple. Vivenna’s twenty-second birthday had come, and the terms of the treaty stipulated that Dedelin could wait no longer.

“Sending Vivenna is a poor plan, but it’s our only plan,” Yarda said. “With more time, I know I can bring the Tedradel to our cause—they’ve hated Hallandren since the Manywar. And perhaps I can find a way to rile Vahr’s broken rebel faction in Hallandren itself. At the very least, we can build, gather supplies, live another year.” Yarda turned to him. “If we don’t send the Hallandren their princess, the war will be seen as our fault. Who will support us? They will demand to know why we refused to follow the treaty our own king wrote!”

“And if we do send them Vivenna, it will introduce the royal blood into their monarchy, and that will have an even *more* legitimate claim on the highlands!”

“Perhaps,” Yarda said. “But if we both know they’re going to attack anyway, then what do we care about their claim? At least this way, perhaps they will wait until an heir is born before the assault comes.”

More time. The general always asked for more time. But what about when that time came at the cost of Dedelin’s own child?

*Yarda wouldn’t hesitate to send one soldier to die if it would mean time enough to get the rest of his troops into better position to attack*, Dedelin thought. *We are Idris. How can I ask anything less of my daughter than I’d demand of one of my troops?*

It was just that thinking of Vivenna in the God King’s arms, being forced to bear that creature’s child . . . it nearly made his hair bleach with concern. That child would become a stillborn monster who would become the next Returned god of the Hallandren.

*There is another way*, a part of his mind whispered. *You don’t have to send Vivenna. . . .*

A knock came at his door. Both he and Yarda turned, and Dedelin called for the visitor to enter. He should have been able to guess who it would be.

Vivenna stood in a quiet grey dress, looking so young to him still. Yet she was the perfect image of an Idrian woman—hair kept in a modest knot, no makeup to draw attention to the face. She was not timid or soft, like some noblewomen from the northern kingdoms. She was just composed. Composed, simple, hard, and capable. Idrian.

“You have been in here for several hours, Father,” Vivenna said, bowing

her head respectfully to Yarda. “The servants speak of a colorful envelope carried by the general when he entered. I believe I know what it contained.”

Dedelin met her eyes, then waved for her to seat herself. She softly closed the door, then took one of the wooden chairs from the side of the room. Yarda remained standing, after the masculine fashion. Vivenna eyed the letter sitting on the desk. She was calm, her hair controlled and kept a respectful black. She was twice as devout as Dedelin, and—unlike her youngest sister—she never drew attention to herself with fits of emotion.

“I assume that I should prepare myself for departure, then,” Vivenna said, hands in her lap.

Dedelin opened his mouth, but could find no objection. He glanced at Yarda, who just shook his head, resigned.

“I have prepared my entire life for this, Father,” Vivenna said. “I am ready. Siri, however, will not take this well. She left on a ride an hour ago. I should depart the city before she gets back. That will avoid any potential scene she might make.”

“Too late,” Yarda said, grimacing and nodding toward the window. Just outside, people scattered in the courtyard as a figure galloped through the gates. She wore a deep brown cloak that bordered on being too colorful, and—of course—she had her hair down.

The hair was yellow.

Dedelin felt his rage and frustration growing. Only Siri could make him lose control, and—as if in ironic counterpoint to the source of his anger—he felt his hair change. To those watching, a few locks of hair on his head would have bled from black to red. It was the identifying mark of the royal family, who had fled to the Idris highlands at the climax of the Manywar. Others could hide their emotions. The royals, however, manifested what they felt in the very hair on their heads.

Vivenna watched him, pristine as always, and her poise gave him strength as he forced his hair to turn black again. It took more willpower than any common man could understand to control the treasonous Royal Locks. Dedelin wasn’t sure how Vivenna managed it so well.

*Poor girl never even had a childhood*, he thought. From birth, Vivenna’s life had been pointed toward this single event. His firstborn child, the girl who had always seemed like a part of himself. The girl who had always made him proud; the woman who had already earned the love and respect of her people. In his mind’s eye he saw the queen she could become, stronger even than he. Someone who could guide them through the dark days ahead.

But only if she survived that long.

"I will prepare myself for the trip," Vivenna said, rising.

"No," Dedelin said.

Yarda and Vivenna both turned.

"Father," Vivenna said. "If we break this treaty, it will mean war. I am prepared to sacrifice for our people. You taught me that."

"You will *not* go," Dedelin said firmly, turning back toward the window. Outside, Siri was laughing with one of the stablemen. Dedelin could hear her outburst even from a distance; her hair had turned a flame-colored red.

*Lord God of Colors, forgive me, he thought. What a terrible choice for a father to make. The treaty is specific: I must send the Hallandren my daughter when Vivenna reaches her twenty-second birthday. But it doesn't actually say which daughter I am required to send.*

If he didn't send Hallandren one of his daughters, they would attack immediately. If he sent the wrong one, they might be angered, but he knew they wouldn't attack. They would wait until they had an heir. That would gain Idris at least nine months.

*And . . . he thought, if they were to try to use Vivenna against me, I know that I wouldn't be able to stop myself from giving in.* It was shameful to admit that fact, but in the end, it was what made the decision for him.

Dedelin turned back toward the room. "Vivenna, you will not go to wed the tyrant god of our enemies. I'm sending Siri in your place."

## 9 Annotation Chapter One

### Tone

You can probably guess why I was worried about the transition from the prologue with Vasher to this chapter with Siri. The tone shift is quite dramatic. Actually, one of the things my agent complained a lot about with this book was the tone. Not just for this chapter shift, but for the entire book.

In his opinion, there were too many different tone shifts going on. We have Vasher's plot, which is dark and sometimes violent. We have the Siri plotline, which is romantic and sometimes whimsical. We have Lightsong, whose chapters are glib and smell faintly of an old comedic murder mystery. Then we have Vivenna, whose tone bounces around across *all* of these.

That's one of the things I like about the book. My agent complained, but I know he likes things more streamlined than I sometimes do. He loved the *Mistborn* books, and I do think they are excellent novels—but they are very focused. The characters are distinctive, but their plots are all centered on many of the same types of goals.

With *Warbreaker*, one of the main things I'm trying to do is contrast it to *Mistborn*. To do something different, something that harkens a little more back to *Elantris*, with its three very different viewpoints.

I want there to be a lot of different tones and feels to this book. It's part of the theme of the novel—that of vibrant Hallandren and its many wonders. I want it to feel like a lot is going on, and that in different parts of the city, very different stories can be told.

### The Origins of Siri and Vivenna

Back around the year 2000 or 2001 I started writing a book called *Mythwalker*. It was an epic fantasy novel, an attempt to go back to basics in the genre. I'd tried several genre-busting epics (one of which was *Elantris*) that focused on heroes who weren't quite the standards of the genre. I avoided peasant boys, questing knights, or mysterious wizards. Instead I wrote books about a man thrown into a leper colony, or an evil missionary, or things like that.

I didn't sell any of those books. (At least, not at first.) I was feeling discouraged, so I decided to write a book about a more standard fantasy character. A peasant boy who couldn't do anything right, and who got caught up in something larger than himself and inherited an extremely powerful

magic.

It was boring.

I just couldn't write it. I ended up stopping about halfway through—it's the only book of mine that I never finished writing. It sits on my hard drive, not even spellchecked, I think, half finished like a skyscraper whose builder ran out of funds.

One of the great things about *Mythwalker*, however, was one of the subplots—about a pair of cousins named Siri and Vivenna. They switched places because of a mix-up, and the wrong one ended up marrying the emperor.

My alpha readers really connected with this storyline. After I abandoned the project, I thought about what was successful about that aspect of the novel. In the end, I decided it was just the characters. They *worked*. This is odd because, in a way, they were archetypes themselves.

The story of the two princesses, along with the peasant/royalty swap, is an age-old fairy tale archetype. This is where I'd drawn the inspiration from for these two cousins. One wasn't trained in the way of the nobility; she was a distant cousin and poor by comparison. The other was heir to her house and very important. I guess the idea of forcing them to switch places struck some very distinct chords in my readers.

Eventually, I decided that I wanted to tell their story, and they became the focus of a budding book in my mind. I made them sisters and got rid of the "accidental switch" plotline. (Originally, one had been sent by mistake, but they looked enough alike that nobody noticed. Siri kept quiet about it for reasons I can't quite remember.) I took a few steps away from the fairy tale origins, but tried to preserve the aspects of their characters and identities that had worked so well with readers.

I'm not sure why using one archetype worked and the other didn't. Maybe it was because the peasant boy story is *so* overtold in fantasy, and I just didn't feel I could bring anything new to it. (At least not in that novel.) The two princesses concept isn't used nearly as often. Or maybe it was just that with Siri and Vivenna I did what you're supposed to—no matter what your inspiration, if you make the characters live and breathe, they will come alive on the page for the reader. Harry Potter is a very basic fantasy archetype—even a cliché—but those books are wonderful.

You have to do new things. I think that fantasy *needs* a lot more originality. However, not every aspect of the story needs to be completely new. Blend the familiar and the strange—the new and the archetypal. Sometimes it's best to rely on the work that has come before. Sometimes you need to

cast it aside.

I guess one of the big tricks to becoming a published author is learning when to do which.

## 10 Annotation Chapter One Part 2

### Ramblemen

Ramblemen are more than simple traveling jugglers or storytellers. They're merchants who specialize in bringing news (for a price) and stories as well as goods and services.

Readers latched onto this word, and I've had a lot of people say, "I love that term! Why don't we get to see a rambleman in the book?"

Because some things in books are just there to hint at the greater world. Sometimes a keen, cool word like that can evoke so much more when used in passing than it would if developed into a side plot or attached to a character.

### Idris's Drabness

One thing to realize is that the Idrians' attempts to make their city colorless are more superstition than they are effective. It's much harder to get colors away from an Awakener than the Idrians think. For instance, black is one of the most powerful colors to use for fueling Awakening—but the Idrians don't even consider it a color. Their browns and tans would also work for Awakening.

However, a lot of times, the traditions of a culture don't have much to do with factual reality. The determination to avoid colors grew out of a desire to contrast with Hallandren and their devilish Awakeners. It got taken to the extreme, however, and as the centuries passed, the Idrians grew confused about just what Awakening is and what it can do. Of course, there are some who know—Hallandren isn't *that* far away. But there's also a lot of rumor and misinformation.

### Mab the Cook

If it sounds to you like Mab knows a lot about Awakening and Hallandren, then you've picked up on something. Mab actually used to live in T'Telir. (She was born in Idris, but ran away during her teens.) During her twenties, she was a courtesan of some repute in the city. She had some fairly high-profile clients—so she was more than just a poor, street-corner prostitute. She fell in love with one of the men, however, and he convinced her to give him her Breath. Then he left her.



As a Drab, she had much more trouble finding work. She'd lost a bit of her sparkle, and whatever she'd used to capture the hearts of men, she'd lost that too. She ended up as a madam, running a much poorer whorehouse, using her old contacts and reputation to get clients.

As soon as she made enough, she bought another Breath and returned to Idris, where she got a job in the king's kitchens. To this day, she bears a lot of ill will toward the Hallandren upper crust, and Awakeners in particular.

## **The King and Yarda Discuss Sending Vivenna**

I go back and forth on this scene. Sometimes I think it's too long. Other times I worry that it's not long enough.

Through the history of the book, this particular scene inched longer and longer as I tried very hard to explain why a good man like Dedelin would send Siri to die in Hallandren. (And also, I wanted to be sure to explain why he was sure she would die there.) There's a whole lot of setup going on in this sequence between the king and his general.

And I worry that there should be more. While what they do makes intrinsic sense to me, a lot of readers have been confused about the tactics here. Why is the king doing what he's doing? Is it really needed? Isn't there another way? This section is the only answer we get to a lot of those questions, since it's the one and only scene in the book from Dedelin's viewpoint.

That said, I think this scene might also be too long. The more space I dedicate to Dedelin, the more readers are going to think that he might be a main character. Some are surprised to read on and find out that the king doesn't make another appearance in the novel. (Well, okay, he makes one more—but he doesn't have a viewpoint.) I don't want to put too much here or have readers focus too much on the tactics of his decision, since really all that matters is that readers understand that Siri has been sent unexpectedly to marry the God King.

I'm still iffy on the scene. Some test readers wanted to see the scene where Dedelin says farewell to Siri. (We skip it; the next scene begins with Siri riding away.) They feel they missed a chapter. But I eventually decided that I needed to keep this beginning flowing quickly, because the longer we spend in Idris, the longer it will take us to get to the real plots in Hallandren. If it weren't so important to set up Siri and Vivenna ahead of time (so that their reversal has impact), I would have just started the book with Siri arriving in Hallandren.

## 11 Chapter Two

Siri sat, stunned, in a rattling carriage, her homeland growing more and more distant with each bump and shake.

Two days had passed, and she still didn't understand. This was supposed to be Vivenna's task. Everybody understood that. Idris had thrown a celebration on the day of Vivenna's birth. The king had started her classes from the day she could walk, training her in the ways of court life and politics. Fafen, the second daughter, had also taken the lessons in case Vivenna died before the day of the wedding. But not Siri. She'd been redundant. Unimportant.

No more.

She glanced out the window. Her father had sent the kingdom's nicest carriage—along with an honor guard of twenty soldiers—to bear her southward. That, combined with a steward and several serving boys, made for a procession as grand as Siri had ever seen. It bordered on ostentation, which might have thrilled her, had it not been bearing her away from Idris.

*This isn't the way it's supposed to be*, she thought. *This isn't the way any of it is supposed to happen!*

And yet it had.

Nothing made sense. The carriage bumped, but she just sat, numb. *At the very least*, she thought, *they could have let me ride horse back, rather than forcing me to sit in this carriage*. But that, unfortunately, wouldn't have been an appropriate way to enter Hallandren.

Hallandren.

She felt her hair bleach white with fear. She was being sent to *Hallandren*, a kingdom her people cursed with every second breath. She wouldn't see her father again for a long while, if ever. She wouldn't speak with Vivenna, or listen to the tutors, or be chided by Mab, or ride the royal horses, or go looking for flowers in the wilderness, or work in the kitchens. She'd . . .

Marry the God King. The terror of Hallandren, the monster that had never drawn a living breath. In Hallandren, his power was absolute. He could order an execution on a whim.

*I'll be safe, though, won't I?* she thought. *I'll be his wife. Wife. I'm getting married. Oh Austre, God of Colors . . .* she thought, feeling sick. She curled up with her legs against her chest—her hair growing so white that it seemed to shine—and lay down on the seat of the carriage, not sure if the shaking she felt was her own trembling or the carriage continuing its

inexorable path southward.

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“I think that you should reconsider your decision, Father,” Vivenna said calmly, sitting decorously—as she’d been trained—with hands in her lap.

“I’ve considered and reconsidered, Vivenna,” King Dedelin said, waving his hand. “My mind is made up.”

“Siri is not suited to this task.”

“She’ll do fine,” her father said, looking through some papers on his desk. “All she really needs to do is have a baby. I’m certain she’s ‘suited’ to that task.”

*What then of my training? Vivenna thought. Twenty-two years of preparation? What was that, if the only point in being sent was to provide a convenient womb?*

She kept her hair black, her voice solemn, her face calm. “Siri must be distraught,” she said. “I don’t think she’s emotionally capable of dealing with this.”

Her father looked up, his hair fading a bit red—the black bleeding away like paint running off a canvas. It showed his annoyance.

*He’s more upset by her departure than he’s willing to admit.*

“This is for the best for our people, Vivenna,” he said, working—with obvious effort—to turn his hair black again. “If war comes, Idris will need you here.”

“If war comes, what of Siri?”

Her father fell silent. “Perhaps it won’t come,” he finally said.

*Austre . . . Vivenna thought with shock. He doesn’t believe that. He thinks he’s sent her to her death.*

“I know what you are thinking,” her father said, drawing her attention back to his eyes. So solemn. “How could I choose one over the other? How could I send Siri to die and leave you here to live? I didn’t do it based on personal preference, no matter what people may think. I did what will be best for Idris when this war comes.”

*When this war comes.* Vivenna looked up, meeting his eyes. “I was going to stop the war, Father. I was to be the God King’s bride! I was going to speak with him, persuade him. I’ve been trained with the political knowledge, the understanding of customs, the—”

“Stop the war?” her father asked, cutting in. Only then did Vivenna realize how brash she must have sounded. She looked away.

“Vivenna, child,” her father said. “There is no stopping this war. Only the promise of a daughter of the royal line kept them away this long, and sending Siri may buy us time. And . . . perhaps I’ve sent her to safety, even when war flares. Perhaps they will value her bloodline to the point that they leave her alive—a backup should the heir she bears pass away.” He grew distant. “Yes,” he continued, “perhaps it is not Siri we should be fearing for, but . . .”

*But ourselves*, Vivenna finished in her mind. She was not privy to all of her father’s war planning, but she knew enough. War would not favor Idris. In a conflict with Hallandren, there was little chance they would win. It would be devastating for their people and their way of life.

“Father, I—”

“Please, Vivenna,” he said quietly. “I cannot speak of this further. Go now. We will converse later.”

Later. After Siri had traveled even farther away, after it would be much more difficult to bring her back. Yet Vivenna rose. She was obedient; it was the way she had been trained. That was one of the things that had always separated her from her sister.

She left her father’s study, closing the door behind her, then walked through the wooden palace hallways, pretending that she didn’t see the stares or hear the whispers. She made her way to her room—which was small and unadorned—and sat down on her bed, hands in her lap.

She didn’t agree at all with her father’s assessment. She *could* have done something. She was to have been the God King’s bride. That would have given her influence in the court. Everyone knew that the God King himself was distant when it came to the politics of his nation, but surely his wife could have played a role in defending the interests of her people.

And her father had thrown that away?

*He really must believe that there is nothing that can be done to stop the invasion.* That turned sending Siri into simply another political maneuver to buy time. Just as Idris had been doing for decades. Either way, if the sacrifice of a royal daughter to the Hallandren was that important, then it still should have been Vivenna’s place to go. It had always been *her* duty to prepare for marriage to the God King. Not Siri’s, not Fafen’s. Vivenna’s.

In being saved, she didn’t feel grateful. Nor did she feel that she would better serve Idris by staying in Bevalis. If her father died, Yarda would be far better suited to rule during wartime than Vivenna. Besides, Ridger—Vivenna’s younger brother—had been groomed as heir for years.

She had been preserved for no reason. It seemed a punishment, in some ways. She'd listened, prepared, learned, and practiced. Everyone said that she was perfect. Why, then, wasn't she good enough to serve as intended?

She had no good answer for herself. She could only sit and fret, hands in her lap, and face the awful truth. Her purpose in life had been stolen and given to another. She was redundant now. Useless.

Unimportant.

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"What was he *thinking!*" Siri snapped, hanging half out the window of her carriage as it bounced along the earthen road. A young soldier marched beside the vehicle, looking uncomfortable in the afternoon light.

"I mean really," Siri said. "Sending *me* to marry the Hallandren king. That's silly, isn't it? Surely you've heard about the kinds of things I do. Wandering off when nobody's looking. Ignoring my lessons. I throw angry fits, for Color's sake!!"

The guard glanced at her out of the corner of his eye, but otherwise gave no reaction. Siri didn't really care. She wasn't yelling at him so much as just *yelling*. She hung precariously from the window, feeling the wind play with her hair—long, red, straight—and stoking her anger. Fury kept her from weeping.

The green spring hills of the Idris highlands had slowly faded away as the days had passed. In fact, they were probably in Hallandren already—the border between the two kingdoms was vague, which wasn't surprising, considering that they'd been one nation up until the Manywar.

She eyed the poor guard—whose only way of dealing with a raving princess was ignoring her. Then she finally slumped back into the carriage. She shouldn't have treated him so, but, well, she'd just been sold off like some hunk of mutton—doomed by a document that had been written years before she'd even been born. If anyone had a right to a tantrum, it was Siri.

*Maybe that's the reason for all of this*, she thought, crossing her arms on the windowsill. *Maybe Father was tired of my tantrums, and just wanted to get rid of me.*

That seemed a little far-fetched. There were easier ways to deal with Siri—ways that didn't include sending her to represent Idris in a foreign court. Why, then? Did he really think she'd do a good job? That gave her pause. Then she considered how ridiculous it was. Her father wouldn't have assumed that she'd do a better job than Vivenna. Nobody did *anything* better than Vivenna.

Siri sighed, feeling her hair turn a pensive brown. At least the landscape was interesting, and in order to keep herself from feeling any more frustrated, she let it distract her for the moment. Hallandren was in the lowlands, a place of tropical forests and strange, colorful animals. Siri had heard the descriptions from ramblemen, and even confirmed their accounts in the occasional book she'd been forced to read. She'd thought she knew what to expect. Yet as the hills gave way to deep grasslands and then the trees finally began to crowd the road, Siri began to realize that there was something no tome or tale could adequately describe.

Colors.

In the highlands, flower patches were rare and unconnected, as if they understood how poorly they fit with Idrian philosophy. Here, they appeared to be everywhere. Tiny flowers grew in great blanketing swaths on the ground. Large, drooping pink blossoms hung from trees, like bundles of grapes, flowers growing practically on top of one another in a large cluster. Even the weeds had flowers. Siri would have picked some of them, if not for the way that the soldiers regarded them with hostility.

*If I feel this anxious, she realized, those guards must feel more so.* She wasn't the only one who had been sent away from family and friends. When would these men be allowed to return? Suddenly, she felt even more guilty for subjecting the young soldier to her outburst.

*I'll send them back when I arrive,* she thought. Then she immediately felt her hair grow white. Sending the men back would leave her alone in a city filled with Lifeless, Awakeners, and pagans.

Yet what good would twenty soldiers do her? Better that someone, at least, be allowed to return home.

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"One would think that you would be happy," Fafen said. "After all, you no longer have to marry a tyrant."

Vivenna plopped a bruise-colored berry into her basket, then moved on to a different bush. Fafen worked on one nearby. She wore the white robes of a monk, her hair completely shorn. Fafen was the middle sister in almost every way—midway between Siri and Vivenna in height, less proper than Vivenna, yet hardly as careless as Siri. Fafen was a bit curvier than either of them, which had caught the eyes of several young men in the village. However, the fact that they would have to become monks themselves if they wanted to marry her kept them in check. If Fafen noticed how popular she was, she'd

never shown it. She'd made the decision to become a monk before her tenth birthday, and her father had wholeheartedly approved. Every noble or rich family was traditionally obligated to provide one person to the monasteries. It was against the Five Visions to be selfish, even with one's own blood.

The two sisters gathered berries that Fafen would later distribute to those in need. The monk's fingers were dyed slightly purple by the work. Vivenna wore gloves. That much color on her hands would be unseemly.

"Yes," Fafen said, "I do think you're taking this all wrong. Why, you act as if you *want* to go down and be married to that Lifeless monster."

"He's not Lifeless," Vivenna said. "Susebron is Returned, and there is a large difference."

"Yes, but he's a false god. Besides, everyone knows what a terrible creature he is."

"But it was my *place* to go and marry him. That is who I am, Fafen. Without it, I am nothing."

"Nonsense," Fafen said. "You'll inherit now, instead of Ridger."

*Thereby unsettling the order of things even further*, Vivenna thought. *What right do I have to take his place from him?*

She allowed this aspect of the conversation to lapse, however. She'd been arguing the point for several minutes now, and it wouldn't be proper to continue. Proper. Rarely before had Vivenna felt so frustrated at having to be proper. Her emotions were growing rather . . . inconvenient.

"What of Siri?" she found herself saying. "You're happy that this happened to her?"

Fafen looked up, then frowned a little to herself. She had a tendency to avoid thinking things through unless she was confronted with them directly. Vivenna felt a little ashamed for making such a blunt comment, but with Fafen, there often wasn't any other way.

"You do have a point," Fafen said. "I don't see why *anyone* had to be sent."

"The treaty," Vivenna said. "It protects our people."

"Austre protects our people," Fafen said, moving on to another bush.

*Will he protect Siri?* Vivenna thought. Poor, innocent, capricious Siri. She'd never learned to control herself; she'd be eaten alive in the Hallandren Court of Gods. Siri wouldn't understand the politics, the backstabbing, the false faces and lies. She would also be forced to bear the next God King of Hallandren. Performing that duty was not something Vivenna had looked

forward to. It would have been a sacrifice, yet it would have been *her* sacrifice, given willingly for the safety of her people.

Such thoughts continued to pester Vivenna as she and Fafen finished with the berry picking, then moved down the hillside back toward the village. Fafen, like all monks, dedicated all of her work to the good of the people. She watched flocks, harvested food, and cleaned houses for those who could not do it themselves.

Without a duty of her own, Vivenna had little purpose. And yet, as she considered it, there *was* someone who still needed her. Someone who had left a week before, teary-eyed and frightened, looking to her big sister with desperation.

Vivenna wasn't needed in Idris, whatever her father said. She was useless here. But she *did* know the people, cultures, and society of Hallandren. And—as she followed Fafen onto the village road—an idea began to form in Vivenna's head.

One that was not, by any stretch of the imagination, proper.



## 12 Annotation Chapter Two

### Siri Rides South, Stunned

Already, you should be able to see another tone shift in the book. We've gone from lazy highland romping to frustration and terror. My goal with this book was to keep that up—to always have things moving and the characters being pulled out of their comfortable lives into situations that force them to stretch.

One fun thing you can research yourself by looking at the first draft chapters of *Warbreaker* I posted. In them, I toyed with having Mab the cook be sent with Siri to be a lady's maid.

I didn't intend this while planning the book, but after writing Mab—and having so much fun with her character—I wanted to keep hold of her and let her add some color to Siri's sections. However, I cut this idea out pretty quickly. (Though a draft of this chapter exists with Mab accompanying Siri—I think in that draft, Mab is the one Siri is complaining to, rather than the poor guard outside the window.)

Why cut Mab? Well, a couple of reasons. First off, Siri's plotline was much more dramatic and emotional if she was forced to leave behind everything she'd known. Giving her a support character like Mab undermined Siri's plot and growth as a character. Beyond that, Siri's plots didn't *need* more color. We've got plenty of interesting characters and experiences coming for her, so the addition of another character wasn't needed.

I tried the chapter, but then realized that my original instincts had been right. I was forced to cut Mab out.

### Character Shifts

This is a fun chapter, formatwise. It looks simple—we've got two alternating sequences with Siri and Vivenna. But what's going on here is that I'm trying to pull the first of many reversals in this book.

A reversal is more than just a plot twist—it's a swap. (Or at least that's how I define it in my head.) Just like *Elantris*'s substructure was that of the chapter triads, *Warbreaker*'s substructure is that of reversals. People change places or do 180-degree turns. This presented a challenge to me, as I had to work hard to make such often-abrupt changes well foreshadowed and rational. That's rather difficult to pull off. Most twists take characters in a slightly new direction; spinning them around completely required a lot more