

The Shaping of a World  
**The World of the Wheel of Time**  
By Robert Jordan

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Imagine that time is a vast wheel, with ages that come and go, only to come again as the wheel turns endlessly. Look far enough into the future along the wheel and you can see the past. Look far enough into the past and you can see the future. The world of *The Wheel of Time* -- the Age of *The Wheel of Time* -- exists in that distant past that is also the distant future. We are the source of many of that Age's myths and legends, and they are the source of many of ours. But our legends do not record the actual facts of that Age. What really happened has been altered over time. Events have become twisted by the years. What one person did has been split among many. What many people did has been compressed and given to one. Almost everything that could be changed has been changed. But a core remains. You are about to delve into that core and beyond -- to the truth. You are about to experience the world that gave birth to Arthur and Thor and Coyote and a hundred more.

Imagine that you were born in that world. You do not know that you live in the breeding ground of legends. Very likely, you do not know how your world came to be as it is, and, if you know a little of it, almost certainly what you "know" is untrue -- a fable spun by the years. The truth...? Yes, the truth. Well.

Three thousand years ago and more, civilization covered the Earth. Technology and science based on tapping into the power that drove the universe and turned the Wheel of Time, the One Power, had conquered disease and poverty. Ordinary people could expect to live as much as three hundred years. They traveled in vehicles driven by the One Power and sailed the seas and perhaps even to other planets in vessels driven by the Power. Men and women who could tap directly into the Power and use it -- channel it -- by their will and ability created that very science and technology. These men and women are called Aes Sedai. In the Old Tongue, that means Servants of All, or Those Who Serve All. You call this time the Age of Legends when you think of it at all. It was a time of great wonders or marvels. Unless you are a scholar, you may not really believe in it all. There *are* stories that are meant only for children, after all.

The One Power had, and has, two parts, *saidin*, the male half, and *saidar*, the female half. By a complex process called Linking, men or women working together could channel either *saidin* and *saidar*, or both, but without the link of a Circle, only men could touch *saidin*, and only women could touch *saidar*. Some dreamed of finding a source of power that men and women alike could use, but in the attempt they drilled into the prison that held Shai'tan, the embodiment of evil. The Creator shaped this prison at the moment of Creation to seal Shai'tan away from the world of humankind. The opening was only a small hole, but it allowed Shai'tan to touch the world with a finger -- a finger of evil that touched everything, everywhere. Humanity quickly learned to call

Shai'tan by other names, such as the Dark One or the Lord of the Grave or others, for to name him was to call his attention. Those who gained the Dark One's attention often prayed for death. With evil caressing the world and seeping into every crack and crevice, civilization began to break down. Order shattered into chaos. Streets that had been safe to walk became havens of crime and violence. A world where only scholars knew a word for war discovered war. The War of the Power. The War of the Shadow. A war that covered the entire world and that was fought with weapons of immense destruction. A war that saw the creation of Trollocs, which are monstrous, murderous blendings of human and animal DNA, and the even more deadly Myrddraal, which are the occasional offspring of Trollocs. Other Shadowspawn came into being, as well, and some of these still survive. Brave are those who face Shadowspawn. Frequently, they who face Shadowspawn also are dead soon after.

An Aes Sedai named Lews Therin Telamon led the forces of the Light. This man, who was called the Dragon, was a brilliant leader and a brilliant general. However, other Aes Sedai went over to the Shadow for the promise of immortality. The leaders among them came to be called the Forsaken, as they had forsaken the Light. After long years of war, it seemed that the Shadow was going to triumph. In an effort to win the war at one stroke, Lews Therin proposed a daring attack to seal the hole -- which is known as the Bore -- that had been drilled into the Dark One's prison. He wished to seal it using a Circle of the strongest male and female Aes Sedai on the side of the Light. Critics claimed that if the seals were not placed with exact precision, the resulting strains would rip the Bore open, freeing the Dark One entirely. Their plan involved the use of two great *sa'angreal*, devices that allowed the channeling of more of the Power than anyone could do safely alone, to place a barrier around the hole. This plan also had its detractors. The Bore had grown larger since it was first made. Surely it would continue to grow within the barrier. The barrier constructed using the two huge *sa'angreal* would hold back the Dark One while he could only reach through the relatively small existing hole, but could it contain him if all the rest of the prison's walls eroded away?

The Hall of the Servants, the ruling body of the Aes Sedai, quickly divided into two camps, and those who supported one plan opposed the other. Support for using the great *sa'angreal*, and opposition to placing seals, was led by a woman named Latra Posae Decume, who finally gathered every female Aes Sedai of significant strength in what much later would come to be called the Fateful Concord. No woman in the agreement would support or take part in Lews Therin's plan, thus killing it, or so it was thought. Everyone believed that precise placement of the seals required a Circle, and that required women, for although men could be brought into Circles, only women could form them. And for this task, only the strongest would do.

Events quickly outran everyone's plans, though. The forces of the Shadow overran the cities where the access keys for the two great *sa'angreal* were kept. Lews Therin argued for his plan anew, but Latra Posae maintained her opposition because of the perceived dangers. Surely the access keys, hidden from the forces of the Shadow, could be retrieved. Passions rose and tempers flared, and for the first time ever, a great division rose between male and female Aes Sedai. Even female Aes Sedai who were nowhere near strong enough to be part of placing the Seals joined the Concord, until every female Aes Sedai backed Latra Posae. The armies of the Shadow continued their seemingly inexorable advances, threatening the two great *sa'angreal* themselves, but in the heat of their beliefs, Latra Posae's followers refused to yield. The risks of attempting to place the seals were too great. Thus Lews Therin resolved to make his attempt without consulting the Hall by using male Aes Sedai only and ten thousand soldiers that he assembled in secret. The male Aes Sedai became known as the fabled Hundred Companions. The result is well known, at least to scholars, though everyone thinks they know something about it. Even scholars know less than they believe, but they know enough for some of the truth to survive. The seven Seals were placed, and the Bore closed off, trapping the Forsaken inside the Bore, for they had been conferring with their master when the attack came. But in the last instant, the Dark One struck back, laying his taint on *saidin*. This was not detected for some time, however. All that was known for certain was that Lews Therin and the sixty-eight survivors of the Hundred Companions went insane on the instant of the Dark One's counterstroke.

The War of the Shadow effectively ended with the sealing of the Bore, for the forces of the Shadow, decapitated of their leadership, fell to quarreling and struggling for power among themselves. But sixty-nine of the strongest male Aes Sedai to be found were roaming the Earth...sixty-nine madmen who could channel the One Power. By the end of the first day after the Bore was sealed, Lews Therin Telamon had earned a new name, Lews Therin Kinslayer, and cities were burning. And as other male Aes Sedai continued to channel *saidin*, they, too, began going mad, until every man in the world who could channel was insane. The Breaking of the World had begun.

Although blame for the Breaking has been laid at the feet of men, the outcome was perhaps the best result that could have been achieved at the time. Delay in an effort to recover the two great *sa'angreal* and the access keys almost certainly would have led to victory for the Shadow, but had women not followed Latra Posae into the Concord, female Aes Sedai would have been at Shayol Ghul as well as men, *saidar* would have been tainted along with *saidin*, and with all of the Aes Sedai going insane, women as well as men, it seems unlikely that anything or anyone would have survived the Breaking. The worst of the War of the Shadow was nothing compared to the Breaking. The destruction of cities and the entire population of the world dead or turned into ragged refugees fleeing for their lives paled in comparison to the changes those men wrought in the face of the earth itself before they died. Entire mountain ranges were flattened and others raised. Dry land rose where oceans had been, and seas rushed in to cover once-dry land. Of what had been, nothing was left except a remnant of population struggling to find enough food to survive one more day. And thus began the formation of the world in which you were born. Worlds are always formed in fire, you see.

Unless you are a scholar, you know nothing about the War of the Shadow and only fables of the Breaking. Even scholars know only scattered fragments, but those two events have shaped the world you live in as surely as hammer and anvil shape iron. Nations, and even an empire, have risen and fallen in the intervening millennia, and two immense wars, the Trolloc Wars and the War of the Hundred Years, have smashed civilizations almost as badly as did the War of the Shadow. Much of the history of the known world before the War of the Hundred Years and the Trolloc Wars is a tattered patchwork known only to scholars and full of errors even then. You know nothing of the world beyond a part of one continent, and likely you know little of that continent very far beyond your village or town, for you must journey by horse or foot or on wind-driven ships. Horse-drawn plows turn the earth, and human hands harvest the crops. Men with swords and pikes and bows fight wars, and disease kills many. Famine is not unknown, nor are plagues. To the north lies the Blight, which are lands where even the trees are twisted by the Shadow -- the haunt of Trollocs and Myrddraal. Few humans venture there, and fewer survive to return. In your world, no one thinks it remarkable if a woman is a magistrate or merchant, or a wagondriver or dockworker. Not many women follow the profession of arms, because upper body strength is at a premium when you must fight with swords, but those who do fight get no more than a second glance -- if that. Much changed when men, and men alone, Broke the World. The pace of life is slower than in what is now called the Age of Legends. People tend to think of what season it is more often than what the month is, and many of the common folk would scratch their heads if asked the year. And yet the intrigues among nations and the great noble Houses and even merchant and banking Houses have the intricacy of a labyrinth laid inside a labyrinth. In some lands, a smile or the nod of a head may set in motion planned events that will see a rival dead or ruined, or perhaps topple a throne.

Your world has printing presses and books and mechanical clocks, though a clock is an expensive luxury -- a fairly large thing that must sit on a shelf or table. You are much more likely to think of how long past sunrise it is or how long to nightfall than by the hours of a clock. Only fragments -- individual items called *ter'angreal* -- remain of the great technology of the Age of Legends. They are hunted for and, when found, jealously guarded by Aes Sedai who no longer know what they were made for. So the Aes Sedai must try to find new uses, which is a dangerous and often fatal undertaking.

Yes, there still are Aes Sedai. For most of the thousands of years since the Breaking, there has been one constant: the White Tower, center of the Aes Sedai. Its power over and influence in the world of humanity waxes and wanes -- sometimes struggling to hold to existence, sometimes deciding who would gain thrones and who would lose them. But only women hold the title of Aes Sedai, now, and the numbers of women who can learn to channel are growing smaller. Men who can channel are hunted down and gentled, which means they're cut off from their ability to channel. Men who have been gentled inevitably fall into depression and die, but they must be gentled, for the Dark One's taint remains on *saidin*. A man who channels eventually will go mad if he does not die first of a rotting sickness that also comes from the taint. In his madness and with his ability to channel the One Power, he will destroy. And yet, there is a prophecy that has run through all the rise and fall of nations. It is known as the Prophecies of the Dragon. This prophecy states that the Dragon will be reborn, that the Dark One will break free, and that the Dragon Reborn will face him in the Last Battle, saving humanity from the Shadow. And Breaking the World again.

That is the world where you were born.



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