

Wind and Truth

Author: Brandon Sanderson

SEVEN AND A HALF YEARS AGO

Gavilar Kholin was on the verge of immortality.

He merely had to find the right Words.

He walked a circle around the nine Honorblades, driven point-first into the stone ground. The air stank of burned flesh; he'd attended enough funeral pyres to know that scent intimately, though these bodies hadn't been burned after the fighting but during it.

"They call it Aharietiam," he said, trailing around the Blades, letting his hand linger on each one. When he became a Herald, would his Blade become like these, imbued with power and lore? "The end of the world. Was it a lie?"

Many who name it such believed what they said, the Stormfather replied.

"And the owners of these?" he said, gesturing to the Blades. "What did the Heralds believe?"

If they had been entirely truthful, the Stormfather said, *then I would not be seeking a new champion.*

Gavilar nodded. "I swear to serve Honor and Roshar as its Herald. Better than these did."

These words are not accepted, the Stormfather said. *You will never find them at random, Gavilar.*

He would try nonetheless. In becoming the most powerful man in the world, Gavilar had often accomplished what others thought impossible.

He rounded the ring of Blades again, alone with them in the shadow of monolithic stones. After dozens of visits to this vision, he could name each and every Blade by its associated Herald. The Stormfather, however, continued to be reticent to share information.

No matter. He *would* have his prize. He ripped Jezrien's long, curved Blade from the stone and swung it, cutting the air. "Nohadon met and grew to know the Heralds."

Yes, the Stormfather admitted.

"They are in there, aren't they?" he said. "The correct Words are somewhere in *The Way of Kings*?"

Yes.

Gavilar had the entire book memorized—he'd taught himself to read years ago so he could search for secrets without revealing them to the women in his life. He tossed the Herald's Blade aside, letting it clang against the stone—which made the Stormfather hiss.

Gavilar mentally chided himself. This was just a vision, and these fake Blades were nothing to him, but he needed the Stormfather to think him pious and worthy at least for now. He took up Chana's Blade. He was fond of this one, as its ornamentation bifurcated the blade with a slit down the center. That long gap would be highly impractical for a normal sword. Here it was a symbol that this Blade was something incredible.

"Chanaranach was a soldier," he said, "and this is a soldier's Blade. Solid and straight, but with that little impossibility missing from the center." He held the Blade in front of him, examining its edge. "I feel I know them each so well. They are my colleagues, yet I could not pick them out of a crowd."

Your colleagues? Do not get ahead of yourself, Gavilar. Find the Words.

Those storming Words. The most important ones Gavilar would ever say. With them, he would become the Stormfather's champion—and, he had deduced, something more. Gavilar suspected he would be accepted into the Oathpact and ascend beyond mortality. He had not asked which Herald he would replace; it felt crass, and he did not want to appear crass before the Stormfather. He suspected, though, that he would replace Talenelat, the one who had not left his Blade.

Gavilar stabbed the sword back into the stone. "Let us return."

The vision ended immediately, and he was in the palace's second-floor study. Bookshelves, a quiet desk for reading, tapestries and carpets to dampen voices. Gavilar wore finery for the upcoming feast: regal robes more archaic than fashionable. Like his beard, the clothing stood out among the Alethi lighteyes. He wanted them to think of him as something ancient, beyond their petty games.

This room was technically Navani's, but it was *his* palace. People rarely looked for him here, and he needed a reprieve from little people with little problems. As he had time before his meetings, Gavilar selected a small book that listed the latest surveys of the region around the Shattered Plains. He was increasingly certain that place held an ancient unlocked Oathgate. Through it, Gavilar could find the mythical Urithiru, and there, ancient records.

He *would* find the right Words. He was close. So tantalizingly close to what all men secretly desired, but only ten had ever achieved. Eternal life, and a legacy that spanned millennia—because you could live to shape it.

It is not so grand as you think, the spren said. Which gave Gavilar pause. The Stormfather couldn't read his mind, could it? No. No, he'd tested that. It didn't know his deepest thoughts, his deepest plans. For if it did know his heart, it wouldn't be working with him.

"What isn't?" Gavilar asked, slipping the book back.

Immortality, the Stormfather said. *It wears on men and women, weathering souls and minds. The Heralds are insane—afflicted with unnatural ailments unique to their ancient natures.*

"How long did it take?" Gavilar asked. "For the symptoms to appear?"

Difficult to say. A thousand years, perhaps two.

"Then I will have that long to find a solution," Gavilar said. "A much more reasonable timeline than the mere century—with luck—afforded a mortal. Wouldn't you say?"

I have not promised you this boon. You guess it is what I offer, but I seek only a champion. Still, tell me, would you accept the cost of becoming a Herald? Everyone you know would be dust by the time you returned.

And here, the lie. "A king's duty is to his people," he said. "By becoming a Herald, I can safeguard Alethkar in a way that no previous monarch ever has. I can endure personal pain to accomplish this. 'If I should die,'" Gavilar added, quoting *The Way of Kings*, "'then I would do so having lived my life right. It is not the destination that matters, but how one arrives there.'"

These words are not accepted, the spren said. *Guessing will not bring you to the Words, Gavilar.*

Yes, well, the Words *were* in that volume somewhere. Sheltered among the self-righteous moralizing like a whitespine in the brambles. Gavilar

Kholin was not a man accustomed to losing. People got what they expected. And he expected not just victory, but *divinity*.

The guard knocked softly. Was it time already? Gavilar called for Tearim to come in, and he did. The guard was wearing Gavilar's own Plate tonight.

"Sire," Tearim said, "your brother is here."

"What? Not Restares? How did Dalinar find me?"

"Spotted us standing watch, I suspect, Your Majesty."

Bother. "Let him in."

The guard withdrew. A second later Dalinar burst in, graceful as a three-legged chull. He slammed the door and bellowed, "Gavilar! I want to go talk to the Parshendi."

Gavilar took a long, deep breath. "Brother, this is a very delicate situation, and we don't want to offend them."

"I won't offend them," Dalinar grumbled. He wore his takama, the robe of the old-fashioned warrior's garb open to show his powerful chest—with some grey hairs. He pushed past Gavilar and threw himself into the seat by the desk.

That poor chair.

"Why do you even care about them, Dalinar?" Gavilar said, right hand to his forehead.

"Why do you?" Dalinar demanded. "This treaty, this sudden interest in their lands. What are you planning? Tell me."

Dear, blunt Dalinar. As subtle as a jug of Horneater white. And equally smart.

“Tell me straight,” Dalinar continued. “Are you planning to conquer them?”

“Why would I be signing a treaty if that were my intent?”

“I don’t know,” Dalinar said. “I just ... I don’t want to see anything happen to them. I like them.”

“They’re parshmen.”

“I like parshmen.”

“You’ve never *noticed* a parshman unless he was too slow to bring your drink.”

“There’s something about these ones,” Dalinar said. “I feel a ... a kinship.”

“That’s foolish.” Gavilar walked to the desk and leaned down beside his brother. “Dalinar, what’s happening to you? Where is the Blackthorn?”

“Maybe he’s tired,” Dalinar said. “Or blinded. By the soot and ashes of the dead, constantly in his face...”

Again Dalinar whined about the Rift? What an enormous hassle. Restares would be here soon, and then ... there was Thaidakar. So many knives to keep balanced perfectly on their tips, lest they slide and cut Gavilar. He couldn’t deal with Dalinar having a crisis of conscience right now.

“Brother,” Gavilar said, “what would Evi say if she saw you like this?”

It was a carefully sharpened spear, slipped expertly into Dalinar’s gut. The man’s fingers gripped the table, and he recoiled at her name.

“She would want you to stand as a warrior,” Gavilar said softly. “And protect Alethkar.”

“I...” Dalinar whispered. “She...”

Gavilar offered a hand and heaved his brother to his feet, then led him to the door. “Stand up straight.”

Dalinar nodded, hand on the doorknob.

“Oh,” Gavilar said. “And Brother? Follow the Codes tonight. There is something strange upon the winds.”

The Codes said not to drink when battle might be imminent. Just a nudge to remind Dalinar that it was a feast, and that there was plenty of wine on hand. Though Dalinar still thought no one knew he’d killed Evi, Gavilar had found the truth, which let him use these subtle manipulations.

Dalinar was out the door a moment later, his lumbering, pliable brain likely focused on two things. First, what he’d done to Evi. Second, how to find something strong enough to make him forget about the first.

When Dalinar was off down the hallway, Gavilar waved Tearim close. The guard was one of the Sons of Honor, a group that was yet another knife Gavilar kept balanced, for they could never know he had outgrown their plans.

“Follow my brother,” Gavilar said. “Subtly ensure that he gets something to drink; maybe lead him to my wife’s secret stores.”

“You had me do that a few months ago, sire,” Tearim whispered back. “There’s not much left, I’m afraid. He likes to share with his soldiers.”

“Well, find him something,” Gavilar replied. “I can let Restares and the others in when they arrive. Go.”

The soldier bowed and followed Dalinar, Shardplate thumping. Gavilar shut the door firmly. When the Stormfather’s voice pushed into his mind, he was not surprised.

He has potential you do not see, that one.

“Dalinar? Of course he does. If I can keep him pointed the right direction, he will burn down entire nations.” Gavilar simply had to ply him with alcohol the rest of the time, so that he didn’t burn down *this* nation.

He could be more than you think.

“Dalinar is a big, dumb, blunt instrument you apply to problems until they break,” Gavilar said, then shivered, remembering seeing his brother approach across a battlefield. Soaked in blood. Eyes appearing to glow red within his helm, hungry for the life Gavilar lived ...

That ghost haunted him. Fortunately, both Dalinar’s pain and his addiction made him easy enough to control.

Gavilar was soon interrupted by another knock. He answered the door and found nothing outside, until the Stormfather hissed a warning in his mind and he felt a sudden chill.

When he turned around, old Thaidakar was there. The Lord of Scars himself, a figure in an enveloping hooded cloak, tattered at the bottom. Storms.

“I was made promises,” Thaidakar said, hood shadowing his face. “I’ve given you information, Gavilar, of the most valuable nature. In payment I requested a single man. When will you deliver Restares to me?”

“Soon,” Gavilar said. “I am gaining his confidence first.”

“It seems to me,” Thaidakar said, “that you’re less interested in our bargain, and more interested in your own motives. It seems to me that I directed you toward something valuable you’ve decided to keep. It seems to me that you play games.”

“It seems to *me*,” Gavilar said, stepping closer to the cloaked figure, “that you’re not in a position to make demands. You need me. So why don’t we just ... keep playing.”

Thaidakar remained still for a moment. Then, with a sigh, he reached up with gloved hands and took down his hood. Gavilar froze—for despite their several interactions, he’d never before seen the man’s face.

Thaidakar was made entirely of softly glowing white-blue light. He was younger than Gavilar had imagined—in his middle years, not the wizened elder he’d seemed. He had a large spike, also blue, through one eye. The point jutted out the back of his skull. Was he some kind of spren?

“Gavilar,” Thaidakar said, “take care. You’re not immortal yet, but you’ve begun to play with forces that rip mortals apart by their very axi.”

“Do you know what they are?” Gavilar demanded, hungry. “The most important Words I’ll ever speak?”

“No,” Thaidakar said. “But listen: none of this is what you *think* it is. Deliver Restares to my agents, and I will help you recover the ancient powers.”

“I’ve grown beyond that,” Gavilar said.

“You can’t ‘grow beyond’ the tide, Gavilar,” Thaidakar replied. “You swim with it or get swept away. Our plans are already in motion. Though to be honest, I don’t know that we did much. That tide was coming regardless.”

Gavilar grunted. “Well, *I* intend to—”

He was cut off as Thaidakar transformed. His face melted into a simple floating sphere with some kind of arcane rune at the center. The cloak, body, and gloves *vanished* into wisps of smoke that evaporated away.

Gavilar stared. That ... that looked a lot like what he’d read of the powers of Lightweavers. Knights Radiant. Was Thaidakar—?

“I know you’re meeting Restares today,” the sphere said, vibrating—it had no mouth. “Prepare him, then deliver him to my agents for questioning. Or else. That is my ultimatum, Gavilar. You would not like to be my enemy.”