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The Emperor's Soul



Synopsis

When Shai is caught replacing the Moon Scepter with her nearly flawless forgery, she must bargain for her life. An assassin has left the Emperor Ashravan without consciousness, a circumstance concealed only by the death of his wife. If the emperor does not emerge after his hundred-day mourning period, the rule of the Heritage Faction will be forfeit and the empire will fall into chaos. Shai is given an impossible task: to create-to Forge-a new soul for the emperor in less than one hundred days. But her soul-Forgery is considered an abomination by her captors. She is confined to a tiny, dirty chamber, guarded by a man who hates her, spied upon by politicians, and trapped behind a door sealed in her own blood. Shai's only possible ally is the emperor's most loyal counselor, Gaotona, who struggles to understand her true talent. Time is running out for Shai. Forging, while deducing the motivations of her captors, she needs a perfect plan to escape...

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As an admittedly rather rabid fan of Brandon, I tore through this book when it showed up on my doorstep today. And I have to say, it is an excellent, excellent novella, certainly Brandon's best effort in this format yet. The Emperor's Soul is set in Sel, the same planet as Elantris (though very far apart from where Elantris takes place). The magic in this world takes the form of elaborate seals, the inspirations for which were drawn from the red signature seals commonly found on East Asian artwork. Though in our world it only leaves an impression of authorship, on Sel, an intricate seal can be used to change the history of an object in a process called Forgery, thus changing its present

state. A battered old desk can be Forged so that it had a caring owner in the past, transforming it into a sturdy, well-maintained version of itself. The book follows the captivity of a talented Forger who is faced with an impossible task; Forging the soul of the emperor, who has been rendered brain-dead by an assassination attempt. I found that a usual problem with Brandon's other novellas is that they feel like a chapter in a larger novel; interesting, but without a strong conclusion which leaves too many open plot lines and a sense of frustration when it ends. However, *The Emperor's Soul* focuses on one self-contained event (that of Shai's captivity), so despite the short length of the book, the conclusion of the novella gives a sense of immense satisfaction to the reader. To express myself in a more succinct way, *The Emperor's Soul* feels like it was meant to be a novella, rather than a novel put on a diet against its will. The book is jammed packed with emotion and tension, but it works well because it is short enough that the reader isn't emotionally exhausted by the end of it. Every character introduced pulls their weight in carrying the plot along. No words are wasted while the book makes surprisingly deep inquiries into the complex motivations of each character. The entire book just feels tight. In the end, all I really want to say is, well done, Mr. Brandon Sanderson! You've successfully mastered the art of the novella.

The Emperor's Soul is set on Sel, the same world as Elantris (but in an empire far away and unrelated to those events.) Shai is a master of the art of Forging - mutating an object's history to change its appearance in the present. However, she's been caught trying to steal the nation's most famous relic, and now she awaits execution... unless she can forge the emperor a new soul in just over three months. An impossible task, but Shai will take any chance she gets. Brandon Sanderson is in top form as usual, despite the shortness of this novella. Shai is a thief and has no compunctions about being opportunistic, but her driving force is her pride in her art. She's proud and tenacious - almost to a fault. I wouldn't exactly say she's lovable, but who doesn't love a good noble thief? The supporting characters, with the exception of Gaotona and Emperor Ashravan, don't really have enough time to be developed, but that's understandable for a book less than 170 pages long. I loved the examination of identity in this book. In order for Shai to be such a good Forger, she has to be extremely good at observing both people and objects - the little things that influence them, their motivations, how they can be manipulated. She needs to be able to produce her desired changes with the minimum of effort required for it to appear natural (think about the complexity of planting an idea via a dream in *Inception* - it's the same concept.) Shai does this instinctively, and it greatly adds to the complexity of the plot and the world building. Of course, she also does it deliberately, and how she pieced together Ashravan's life from notes and interviews is fascinating. I was slightly

dissatisfied at the end because it was over too quickly and I wanted more! More of the characters, more plot, more of the world. I can't really complain about that, though - this is a novella, and I knew that going into it, and Sanderson does a great job with it. The only thing that felt rushed was Shai's task [SPOILER WARNING] - she said it would ordinarily take her two years at least, but she manages to complete it in three months - why was she able to do it so much faster? I would've liked some sort of explanation. [END SPOILERS] I hope Sanderson writes more books featuring Shai and the Empire - perhaps even coming into contact with characters from Elantris.

Quick story: I read this while waiting at one of Sanderson's book signings. Such a great way to wait before talking with my favorite author. The Sanderson fans are amazing, and this book was a fun addition to the night. And now it's even signed. :) Reader thoughts: What a fascinating little tale. I wouldn't have been interested enough to dive into the story for 300 pages, but this was great. I love the idea of basing magic off stamps and that the stamp had to be artistically drawn well and that the material's background had to be considered. This magic system really allowed the MC to be clever. Readers admire someone who has that level of expertise. The MC's personality was great. She stamped her own table and prison cell so she'd be more comfortable, ha! I loved the end! I expected part of it, but it was still wonderful. I also loved that the MC had her own stamps to change herself. Writer thoughts: Sanderson uses several storytelling devices to his advantage here. I'll discuss two. The days as a countdown served as a perfect timebomb. Not only do we get a sense of progression, but we also get rising tension. This has happened in several books I've read, including Twelve Days of Faery. The prisoner-on-death-row-hired-for-vital-work has been used before, too (my favorite would be The Thief, but another is Throne of Glass). This plot point is really neat because the reader automatically knows what the MC wants (freedom), and that everyone else in the book is the MC's enemy. This keeps you on your toes more than other books that let the character find a haven and slow down for a page or two.

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