



## About the Author

### Full text biography:

### Brandon Sanderson

**Birth Date :** 1975

**Place of Birth :** United States,Nebraska,Lincoln

**Nationality:** American

**Occupation :** Novelist

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about this author

### Awards:

David Gemmell Legend Award, 2011, for *The Way of Kings*; two-time recipient of the reviewers' choice award, *Romantic Times*, for best epic fantasy; Hugo Award for best novella, 2013, for *The Emperor's Soul*.

### Personal Information:

Born December 19, 1975, in Lincoln, NE; married Emily Bushman, July 7, 2006; children: three sons. **Education:** Brigham Young University, B.A., M.F.A., 2005. **Religion:** Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. **Addresses:** Home: American Fork, UT. Agent: JABberwocky Literary Agency, P.O. Box 4558, Sunnyside, NY 11104-0558.

### Career Information:

Writer. Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, former creative writing instructor, cohost of podcast. Has worked as a hotel desk clerk and Mormon missionary in Seoul, Korea, in the 1990s; contributor to weekly podcast, *Writing Excuses*.

### Writings:

- *Elantris*, Tor (New York, NY), 2005, 2nd edition, with new preface by Dan Wells, afterword by Sanderson, 2015.
- *Warbreaker*, Tor (New York, NY), 2009.
- *The Way of Kings* ("Stormlight Archive" series), Tor (New York, NY), 2010.
- *The Emperor's Soul*, Tachyon (New York, NY), 2012.
- *Legion* (novella), Subterranean Press (Burton, MI), 2012.
- *The Rithmatist* (young-adult novel), Tor Teen (New York, NY), 2013.
- *Steelheart* ("Reckoners" series; for young adults), Delacorte Press (New York, NY), 2013.
- *Legion: Skin Deep*, Subterranean Press (Burton, MI), 2014.
- *Words of Radiance* ("Stormlight Archive" series), Tor (New York, NY), 2014.
- *Firefight* ("Reckoners" series; for young adults), Delacorte Press (New York, NY), 2015.

### "MISTBORN" SERIES

- *The Final Empire*, Tor (New York, NY), 2006.

- *The Well of Ascension*, Tor (New York, NY), 2007.
- *The Hero of Ages*, Tor (New York, NY), 2008.
- *The Alloy of Law*, Tor (New York, NY), 2011.
- *Shadows of Self*, Tor (New York, NY), 2015.

#### "ALCATRAZ" SERIES; FOR YOUNG READERS

- *Alcatraz versus the Evil Librarians*, Scholastic Press (New York, NY), 2007.
- *Alcatraz versus the Scrivener's Bones*, Scholastic Press (New York, NY), 2008.
- *Alcatraz versus the Knights of Crystallia*, Scholastic Press (New York, NY), 2009.
- *Alcatraz versus the Shattered Lens*, Scholastic Press (New York, NY), 2010.

#### "WHEEL OF TIME" SERIES; WITH ROBERT JORDAN

- *The Gathering Storm*, Tor (New York, NY), 2009.
- *Towers of Midnight*, Tor (New York, NY), 2010.
- *A Memory of Light*, Tor (New York, NY), 2013.

Served as editor-in-chief of Brigham Young University's *The Leading Edge*; author of a blog. Also author of video game spinoff e-novels, *Infinity Blade: Awakening*, 2011, and *Infinity Blade: Redemption*, 2013, and e-book novellas *Perfect State*, *Shadows for Silence*, and *Sixth of the Dusk*.

#### Media Adaptions:

*Alcatraz versus the Evil Librarians* was optioned for film by DreamWorks Animation; "Mistborn" was optioned for film by Paloppa Pictures and Little Orbit will release it as a video game on all platforms; *Steelheart* was optioned for a film by Fox Searchlight.

#### Sidelights:

Brandon Sanderson is an American writer. Born in Nebraska, he earned degrees from Brigham Young University before becoming a creative writing instructor there. Sanderson focuses on epic themes in his writing, populating his worlds with varied characters, magic, and unique settings. He is the author of a score of fantasy and science fiction works, both as stand-alone novels and in a number of series and for adults, young adults, and middle-grade readers. Writing on *Tor.com*, Martin Cahill noted: "Not many authors are quite as consistently prolific as Brandon Sanderson." Cahill added: "Brandon's epic fantasy novels [for adults] take place in a same universe, known as the Cosmere. Across the many novels and worlds, there is a secret story playing out behind the scenes, as characters from one book suddenly pop up in others, with new sides and facets being revealed with every new story; ultimately, this story is something that will thread throughout every novel, and not just hide in the shadows as we move forward." *Paste* website contributor Frannie Jackson commented on the reason for Sanderson's continuing popularity: "Dedication to his craft, intricate world building--none of this would matter if there wasn't a relatable, human element to Sanderson's characters. Three-dimensional personalities permeate his novels." Queried about the secret of his productivity by *Salt Lake Tribune Online* contributor Ellen Fagg Weist, Sanderson replied: "It's the result of two things: First, loving what I do. Second, treating writing like a real job. I'm the result of Mormon pioneer stock, and though I don't have any oxen to tend or potatoes to plant, I had the concept of good hard work drilled into me as a child. I get up, and I work. The writing doesn't always come. I have an inkling that in the times when other writers have writer's block and are staring at their screens, I instead jump to another project and write on that until my subconscious can figure out what's wrong with the original story."

Sanderson's first novel, *Elantris*, tells the story of a fallen city of the gods, exploring what caused it to fail and how the major players of the novel--Prince Raoden, Princess Sarene, and Gyorn Hrathen--will affect its future. Sanderson's personal faith has influenced his writing, leading him to include strong religious themes within his narrative.

Jackie Cassada remarked in *Library Journal* that Sanderson shows "skill at turning conventional fantasy on its head,"

resulting in "a conclusion both satisfying and original." In *Booklist*, Regina Schroeder called the book "a surprisingly satisfying, ... epic fantasy that invokes a complex, vibrant world." In a review for *Publishers Weekly*, a contributor found Sanderson's work to be an "outstanding fantasy debut, refreshingly complete unto itself and free of the usual genre clichés," and featuring a "smoothly written, perfectly balanced narrative."

*Elantris* is a stand-alone novel, and Sanderson claims to have no plans for a sequel. His second title, *The Final Empire*, became the first volume of the "Mistborn" series. In 2007 Sanderson continued the "Mistborn" series with the publication of *The Well of Ascension*. Vin is left to come to terms with his legacy leading the revolution while everyone seeks to find the former leader's Atium supplies, gaining power for themselves. In another *Booklist* review, Schroeder pointed out that the protagonist's "struggles with love and power inject the human element into" the story. A contributor to *Publishers Weekly* said that "this entertaining read will especially please those who always wanted to know what happened" in the aftermath of good defeating evil. The following year, Sanderson furthered the series with *The Hero of Ages*. Elend Venture solidifies his power base as the mist increases its dangerous activity. Vin must lead his army to victory over Elend to return the land to normalcy. Paul Di Filippo, reviewing the novel in online *Sci Fi Weekly*, recalled that "Sanderson's prose is always eminently readable, not flashy, not stolid, and his personages likable and authorially conducive to being conjured up on our mental stage. Although the books are weighty, they never feel ponderous." Di Filippo called the book "a hybrid kind of novel that offers some unique pleasures that neither pure fantasy nor pure [science fiction] can deliver." Schroeder stated that the series "concludes satisfactorily." A contributor to *Publishers Weekly* also praised the book, noting that the novel contains "a dramatic and surprising climax."

In 2011 Sanderson published the fourth novel in the series, *The Alloy of Law*. Set 300 years after the end of *The Hero of Ages*, the story centers on wealthy Waxillium Ladrian, who is gifted with the powers of Feruchemy and Allomancy. He forgoes his place in high society and takes to the streets in the Rough to help restore law and order. After he accidentally kills his lover, he leaves the Rough to accept his position as lord of the Ladrian house. Trouble follows, however, and Wax is forced to take up arms again.

*Booklist* contributor Alison Downs observed that the novel is "rife with laugh-out-loud moments, religious and philosophical ponderings, and plenty of crime-fighting action." A contributor to *Kirkus Reviews* remarked that the author's "ideas on the source and employment of magic are both arresting and original--just don't expect rigorously worked out plot details, memorable characters or narrative depth." In a review in *Library Journal*, William Baer lauded that "Sanderson continues to show that he is one of the best authors in the genre." Describing the novel as being "part Sherlock Holmes, part X-Men," a contributor to *Publishers Weekly* said that *The Alloy of Law* "is full of close shaves, shootouts, and witty banter." A contributor to *Medieval Bookworm* website summarized that this novel is "definitely recommended if you enjoy fantasy, as are all of Sanderson's books; this isn't an earth-shattering read, but it is a good one." Writing in the online *Graeme's Fantasy Book Review*, Graeme Flory commented that "Sanderson does a fine job of keeping to the roots of the first trilogy whilst also showing how the world has moved on. I couldn't help but think though that the setting grew less detailed the further the characters moved into the depths of the city." Flory conceded, however, that "this niggle (as well as the others) was a minor one though. *The Alloy of Law* was a thoroughly entertaining read that I couldn't get enough of. Any book that makes you want to go out and read everything else an author has written is doing its job very well indeed."

Sanderson created a new series, called "Alcatraz," in 2007 with the release of *Alcatraz versus the Evil Librarians*. Thirteen-year-old foster child Alcatraz Smedry learns that there is a whole new dimension to the world one day when he receives a bag of unusual sand as an inheritance from his parents. When the bag is stolen by a group of librarians, Alcatraz and his relatives work together to stop them from taking over the world. A contributor to *BraveMonster.com* remarked: "Sanderson has a very unique style of writing that is extremely fun to read." A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer argued that "this nutty novel isn't for everyone, but it's also sure to win passionate fans." Vicky Smith, reviewing *Alcatraz versus the Evil Librarians* in the *Horn Book* magazine, observed that "for all its self-aware preciousness, this still stands as a happily action-packed romp."

Writing in *School Library Journal*, Steven Engelfried opined that "readers who prefer fantasy with plenty of humor

should enjoy entering Alcatraz's strange but amusing world." A contributor to *Kirkus Reviews* remarked: "The premise is intriguing and Sanderson gets in some good digs at pushers of books." The following year Sanderson published the second book in the "Alcatraz" series, *Alcatraz versus the Scrivener's Bones*. In the book, Alcatraz expands his knowledge on his own powers while searching for his grandfather in Egypt. There he meets more curators and librarians who use the Dark Oculary. A contributor to *Kirkus Reviews* commented that "the animation-style action seems more appropriate to a big screen than a reader's imagination." However, *Horn Book* magazine reviewer Claire E. Gross stated: "Sanderson gives due weight to his characters' dangerous situation and its emotional implications, balancing absurdity, action, and character growth for a thoroughly thrilling read."

The "Alcatraz" series continues with *Alcatraz versus the Knights of Crystallia*, in which Alcatraz Smedry must find a traitor among the Knights of Crystallia and put an end to a plot that might allow the Librarians to regain power. He also begins to feel a certain strange emotion, perhaps love, from his Librarian mother. Reviewing this third installment in *Horn Book*, Claire E. Gross felt that the "plot offers up plenty of action, gadgetry, metafictional humor, [and] grudgingly dispensed hints of the librarians' endgame." Elaine E. Knight, writing in *School Library Journal*, noted of this novel, "Beneath the wild humor, there are surprisingly subtle messages about responsibility and courage."

In the series finale, *Alcatraz versus the Shattered Lens*, Alcatraz, aided by Bastille and a supply of exploding teddy bears, takes on an army of evil Librarian robots. A *Children's Bookwatch* reviewer termed this an "absorbing story of gigantic robots, evil librarians, and danger." *Horn Book* contributor Anita L. Burkam also had praise for this installment, noting that readers will be "drawn into Alcatraz's cohesive world, with its unique form of magic and that magic's natural enemy, the Librarians."

Sanderson's success with his "Mistborn" series drew the attention of the widow of author Robert Jordan to help complete that author's ambitious "Wheel of Time" series. Sanderson contributed *The Gathering Storm*, *Towers of Midnight*, and the concluding volume, *A Memory of Light*. A *California Bookwatch* reviewer called *Towers of Midnight* "powerful, ... vivid, [and] compelling."

Sanderson worked from Jordan's notes in the final book of the series, *A Memory of Light*, in which the Last Battle is coming to determine the end of the world. A *California Bookwatch* reviewer termed this a "top pick for any science fiction and fantasy collection." Similarly, *Xpress Reviews* contributor William Baer felt that "anyone who likes epic fantasy will enjoy it."

Projected at ten volumes, the "Stormlight Archives" series is a "sprawling epic set on Roshar, a world regularly scoured by huge hurricanes called highstorms," according to *New York Times* contributor Dana Jennings. "There are soldiers and scholars, slaves and magic, and Brightlords and Voidbringers. It's all traditional stuff for fantasy fans, but what sets [the series] apart is how Mr. Sanderson raises genre stakes through detailed world building. The richly imagined books--he calls them a 'love letter of sorts to the epic fantasy genre'--also contain notes on Roshar poetry and illustrated tips on how to raise chulls (oversize crustaceans domesticated on Roshar)." The first novel in this series, *The Way of Kings*, appeared in 2010. This thousand-page series launch sets up this "classic story of intrigue, magic, and war, with a large cast of characters and multiple settings lovingly detailed," as *Booklist* reviewer Roland Green commented. Stacey Hayman, writing in *Voice of Youth Advocates*, termed this novel a "good mix of military action, political machinations, faith-based intrigue, and personal drama keep the pages turning." A *Publishers Weekly* contributor similarly felt that this series launch "will keep epic fantasy fans intrigued and hoping for redemptive future installments." Likewise, *Xpress Reviews* writer Baer observed, "Sanderson is a master of hooking the reader in the first few pages, and once again he doesn't disappoint."

Anxious series readers had to be patient as Sanderson was also busy with other series for the next several years. The second volume in the series, *Words of Radiance*, was published four years after the first and was another thousand-page epic. Here the author continues to build the world of Roshar, which a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer compared to the world of Dune by the writer Frank Herbert. The novel also continues the stories of Shallan and Kaladin and of the seemingly endless battles between the humans and the humanoid Parshendi. *Booklist* reviewer Green praised Sanderson's "meticulous ... world-building," and termed this second installment a "very impressive continuation."

Sanderson writes for young adults in the "Reckoners" series, which begins with the 2013 novel *Steelheart*. This saga begins with a burst in the sky that endows some ordinary people with extraordinary powers and the desire to rule. The public calls them Epics. In the postapocalyptic world, what was once Chicago is now Newcago, and the powerful Epic named Steelheart has become emperor. The only ones to fight his tyranny are the Reckoners, a mysterious group of ordinary humans who closely study the Epics to find their weaknesses and then destroy them. Each of the Reckoners has a special talent, from research and planning, to science and invention, and weapons and ammunition. Teenager David desperately wants to join the Reckoners, for Steelheart killed his father ten years ago, and he knows Steelheart's weakness. *Booklist* reviewer Frances Bradburn praised the "snappy dialogue, bizarre plot twists, high-intensity action, and a touch of mystery and romance" in this series opener. *Voice of Youth Advocates* contributor Jonathan Ryder noted that the "book should appeal to teens looking for a more developed take on the 'superhero' mythos." A *Publishers Weekly* critic also had a high assessment of *Steelheart*, commenting that this "ultraviolent yet playful entry into the superhero genre ... [is] an absolute page-turner." Likewise, a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor termed it a "straight-up Marvel Comics-style action drama featuring a small band of human assassins taking on costumed, superpowered supervillains with melodramatic monikers."

The action continues in *Firefight*, which focuses on the aftermath of the battle against Steelheart. David, now dubbed Steelslayer, finds a new and even more powerful enemy than the Epic who killed his father. Now the Reckoners must take on the deadly High Epic Regalia who rules Babylon Restored, formerly Manhattan. Bradburn, writing in *Booklist*, noted that this installment "concludes in true, violent, high-action Steelslayer style, promising ... more of the same" in the next installment. A *Kirkus Reviews* critic also had praise for this second volume of a planned trilogy, concluding: "Big in size and vision, this is the rare middle volume that keeps the throttle open and actually moves the story along significantly."

In addition to his series work, Sanderson has continued to write stand-alone novels and novellas. He sets his award-winning fantasy novella, *The Emperor's Soul*, in the same world as his debut novel, *Elantris*. It features the Forger, Shai, who faces death for having forged a treasured work of art. Now she will be pardoned if she can do the seemingly impossible: forge a news soul for the Emperor. Baer, writing in *Xpress Reviews*, noted that "fantasy fans will love both the compelling story and the creative magical setting." *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* reviewer Charles De Lint also had praise, commenting: "*The Emperor's Soul* is one of those rare high fantasies that feels fresh and is filled with a sense of wonder."

Sanderson writes for young adults in *The Rithmatist*, a fantasy about a group who have the magical powers to bring two-dimensional objects to life, thus protecting their world. These Rithmatists are selected when they are eight. Joel longs to be a Rithmatist, but he is already sixteen. Then, when student Rithmatists at the Armedius Academy suddenly begin disappearing, Joel investigates and soon is battling not only to become a Rithmatist but also to save the American Isles. *Booklist* reviewer Michael Cart lauded this novel, calling it a "fast-paced mash-up of fantasy and adventure that will grab readers' attention at the first page and hold it until the inconclusive end." Similarly, a *Kirkus Reviews* critic thought that readers will "devour this well-crafted mix of action and setup, enriched by a thoroughly detailed cultural and historical background and capped by a distinctly unsettling twist." A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer concluded: "This high-spirited, exciting story will appeal to readers of all ages."

#### Related Information:

#### PERIODICALS

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- *Booklist*, May 1, 2005, Regina Schroeder, review of *Elantris*, p. 1577; July 1, 2006, Regina Schroeder, review of *The Final Empire*, p. 43; August 1, 2007, Regina Schroeder, review of *The Well of Ascension*, p. 55; October 1, 2008, Regina Schroeder, review of *The Hero of Ages*, p. 32; October 15, 2011, Alison Downs, review of *The Alloy of Law*, p. 25; May 15, 2009, Roland Green, review of *Warbreaker*, p. 33; August 1, 2010, Roland Green, review of *The Way of Kings*, p. 37; May 15, 2013, Michael Cart, review of *The Rithmatist*, p. 64; September 1, 2013, Frances Bradburn, review of *Steelheart*, p. 105; April 1, 2014, Roland Green, review of *Words of*

*Radiance*, p. 34; January 1, 2015, Frances Bradburn, review of *Firefight*, p. 88.

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- *Children's Bookwatch*, January, 2011, "Scholastic Press."
- *Chronicle*, July 1, 2005, Don D'Amassa, review of *Elantris*, p. 20.
- *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City, UT), March 12, 2007, Rosalie Westenskow, "Wee-Hour Musings Paying Off for Author," author interview.
- *Horn Book*, January, 2008, Vicky Smith, review of *Alcatraz versus the Evil Librarians*, p. 94; November-December, 2008, Claire E. Gross, review of *Alcatraz versus the Scrivener's Bones*, p. 715; November-December, 2009, Claire E. Gross, review of *Alcatraz versus the Knights of Crystallia*, p. 685; January-February, 2011, Anita L. Burkam, review of *Alcatraz versus the Shattered Lens*, p. 100.
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- *New York Times*, April 17, 2014, Dana Jennings, "After Years of Writing, an Author's Own Epic Fantasy Comes True," p. C4.
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people. If I do, I'm terribly sorry! Make sure you let me know so I can fix it.

My original writing group on this book included Isaac Stewart, Dan Wells, Sandra Taylor, Janci Patterson, Eric James Stone, and Kayla Bennion. They read this in a very early form, and were a huge help in getting it ready. I also want to make note of the early American work *The Narrative of the Captivity and the Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, which makes an (admittedly altered) appearance in this volume.

Other alpha and beta readers include Chris "Miyabi" King, Josh & Michelle Walker, Ben & Ben Olsey, Kalyani Poluri, Austin Hussey, Jilena O'Brien, Kristina Kusler, C. Lee Player, Brian Hill, Adam Hussey, and Ben McSweeney—who was a valuable alpha reader as well as the artist. We joyed with doing a graphic novel along the way; if you can ever corner him, ask to see some of the test pages for that. They're awesome.

Stacy Whitman was also very helpful in getting this book ready. (At one time, as an editor, she wanted to buy it. Thanks, Stacy, for your help!) The copy editor was Deanna Hoak, and deserves your thanks (and mine) for helping make the manuscript less typo-y. (Though I believe it's beyond the power of any mortal to completely relieve my prose of typos!)

Susan Chang, the book's editor, and Kathleen Doherty at Tor have been wonderful to work with, and have both been big believers in this book for many years. I'm glad we were finally able to release it. As always, I'd like to thank Moshe Feder for his support, Joshua Bimes for his agent-fu, and Eddie Schneider for his sub-agent-fu.

A special thanks also goes out to Karen Ahlstrom and the intermittent Peter Ahlstrom. For many years, they believed in this book and pushed me to give it the time and love it deserved.

Finally, as always, I want to thank my family and my loving wife, Emily. They don't just put up with me; they encourage me to thrive. Thank you.

—Brandon Sanderson

## READING AND ACTIVITY GUIDE

The information, activities, and discussion questions that follow are intended to enhance your reading of *The Rithmatist*. Please feel free to adapt these materials to suit your needs and interests.

### WRITING AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

1. Author Brandon Sanderson is known for writing epic fantasy stories. Go to the library or online to find the literary definition of the term "epic." Write a short essay explaining how *The Rithmatist* fits into the category of epic novels—or how it doesn't. If you have read other epic novels, such as *Redwall* by Brian Jacques, *Dragonriders of Pern* by Anne McCaffrey, or Harry Potter by J. K. Rowling, you may include comparisons to these in your essay.
2. In addition to its epic qualities, *The Rithmatist* has features of a *steampunk* or *gearpunk* novel. Go to the library or online to learn more about the elements of steampunk and gearpunk literature. Then, using descriptions from the novel, create an illustrated poster depicting steampunk and gearpunk images, concepts, or scenes from the novel.
3. Imagine that you are a non-Rithmatist scholar of things Rithmatic, such as Joel aspires to be. Using information from the novel, create a PowerPoint or other type of illustrated



presentation explaining Rithmatic lines, shapes, and defenses; the relationship between Rithmatists and ordinary people; and the role of the Church in Rithmatist selection. Share your presentation with friends or classmates.

4. In the character of Melody, write a journal entry describing your first morning spent with Professor Fitch and Joel. How do you feel about the prospect of a summer of remedial tracing? Why do believe you don't fit in with the other Rithmatic students? What do you think of Joel?
5. Near the end of the novel, Joel returns to his former home and his father's workshop. In the character of Joel, write a journal entry describing your emotions as you step back through the doorway. Or, write a journal entry comparing your experience reentering your father's space to your experience reentering the inception room as a teen instead of a grade school child.
6. The novel makes reference to a real book from literary history. Mary Rowlandson's seventeenth-century narrative of being held captive by Native Americans has been called America's first bestseller. Go to the library or online to learn more about Rowlandson, her experience, and her publication. Then, write a short essay explaining why you think Brandon Sanderson chose to feature this particular historical work in *The Rithmatist*.
7. Melody invites Joel into town for ice cream and, when he can't afford the cost, she covers it. In the character of Joel or Melody, write an internal monologue exploring your thoughts about seeing the town through the other's eyes, your comfort level and other considerations about giving/receiving money, and whether you feel this trip has changed your relationship in any way.
8. *The Rithmatist* is set in an alternate America with different technology, boundaries, and an ongoing threat posed by the wild chalkings at Nebraska. Do any of these differences call to mind societal or governmental concerns happening in your real world? Bring in two or three current newspaper clippings that reference subject matter that makes you think

of the novel. For each clipping, write a two- to three-sentence description of the connection you see between the novel and the news report.

9. Examining a clockwork-infused coin given to him by Melody, Joel starts to consider the element of time in his understanding of humanity and Rithmatics. With friends or classmates, role-play a conversation between Joel, Professor Fitch, and Father Stewart in which Joel presents his thoughts on time and the two other characters accept, reject, or elaborate upon his thoughts.
10. Melody is stunned when Joel fails to qualify as a Rithmatist for a second time. Were you? Imagine you are a student at Armedius Academy in whom Joel has confided about his second inception room experience. Write a detailed petition statement demanding a third inception ceremony for Joel. If desired, read your statement aloud to friends or classmates and invite them to vote on whether they would be in favor of a third inception ceremony.
11. Use oil pastels or other visual arts media to create a colorful, illustrated postcard invitation—or design a mock Facebook event page—to encourage people to attend the end-of-year student Melee at Armedius Academy.
12. Assume the character of a Rithmatic student in your final year at Armedius before being sent to complete your education at Nebraska. Create your own chalking, drawn with chalk on a sheet of black construction paper. On a large index card, write a brief description of your chalking, how you came to draw this particular form, the name of the Rithmatic defense with which it is most effective, and your proudest accomplishment as a fledgling Rithmatist. If desired, create a display of "Rithmatic Artworks" by combining your drawing and description with pictures created by friends or classmates.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The prologue of *The Rithmatist* describes something frightening happening to a girl named Lilly. However, it is not until later in the novel that the reader fully realizes what these opening pages have described. How might you interpret the events of the prologue before reading further in *The Rithmatist*? What images and emotions from the prologue resonate through the rest of the novel? After reading the whole novel, how would you reinterpret the prologue? Why, in terms of plot and themes, do you think the author chose to begin his novel with this scene featuring the first Rithmatic student disappearance?
2. From the start of the novel, it is clear that Joel is frustrated by his lack of Rithmatic talent. How does this affect his actions throughout the story? Describe at least two ways in which Joel is an outsider at Armedius Academy. Then, name at least two ways in which Joel is more of a Rithmatist than many of the chosen Rithmatic students.
3. What is Joel's relationship with Professor Fitch? Why is he so upset when Fitch loses the duel to Nalizar? To what important new responsibility does this lead for Joel? Why has Melody found herself under the tutelage of Fitch?
4. Describe Joel's relationships with Exton, Florence, and his mother, all non-Rithmatist characters. What secrets do these characters keep about their connection to Rithmatics? What conclusions might you draw about the relationships between Rithmatists and others in the greater world?
5. Between chapters of the novel, diagrams illustrate the art of Rithmatics. As a reader, how do you connect with these instructional elements? How do they help you to build a clearer sense of the world of Rithmatic fighting? Does this complex scheme, thoroughly taught to only a select few, remind you of any realms of scholarship or leadership in your own world? Explain your answer.
6. At the beginning of Chapter 9, Joel feels certain that

"... the Master had *not* meant for him to be a clerk." Later, in Chapter 22, Joel muses, "Was there really a Master up in heaven? ... The truth is, I'm not sure I *don't* believe, either. You might be there. I hope you are, I guess." (p. 322) Have you ever felt uncertainties about your faith or government, such as Joel's, or worries about what path you should choose for your future? What words of support or empathy might you offer to Joel?

7. Geometric shapes versus chalklings. Creativity versus control. Being a Rithmatist versus understanding Rithmatics. The Church versus academia. Could you read *The Rithmatist* as a story about the tensions between art and science, between history and faith? Explain your answer.
8. List all of the characters Joel considers as suspects before the capture of the real kidnapper. What important discovery does Joel make about the mysterious new chalk symbol found at each crime scene that helps him solve the mystery? What might the discovery of this new symbol foretell about the future of Rithmatics?
9. How are the kidnapped children rescued? What is a Forgotten? Do you think the Forgotten has any relationship to the creature Joel sees in the inception room? Why or why not?
10. Why did Harding embark on his kidnapping spree? Do you think any one individual—even Joel—could have stopped him?
11. At the end of the novel, the "Professor Fitch" Melee team of Joel and Melody impress their audience because "... they were two students who didn't just duel. They fought. They understood." (p. 369) What is the difference between fighting and dueling? How might Joel and Melody's perceived weaknesses in Rithmatics have led to this impressive victory? Have you ever struggled with a weakness, such as a learning difficulty or family problem, that has ultimately made you stronger?
12. What are your feelings about Nalizar at the end of the novel? Do you think he was trying to harm or save Joel and Melody during their heroic encounter with Inspector Harding?

13. Where is Joel at the end of the novel? How would you describe the danger facing the world now that the kidnapping mystery has been solved? What role do you feel Joel ought to play in this ongoing battle? What might you title the next installment of the Rithmatist series?

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