

Themes of the wheel of time series

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



A Gleeman's Tale

What if present day Earth is really a faded image of magical ages long past, and an unfinished sketch of technological ages far into the future? What if this time is simply a period stuck in a never ending cycle, reincarnated from countless incarnations of itself from distant days long forgotten? Robert Jordan's fantasy series *The Wheel of Time* takes place in an unnamed world that exists simultaneously as both Earth in the distant past and future due to the series' cyclical nature of time. The current era in the book, called the Third Age, has high fantasy and mythological elements. It was preceded by the technologically advanced Age of Legends, which ended with a global cataclysm. The age before that, the First Age, is implied to be modern-day Earth. During the current Third Age, the countries of the Westlands continent play a central role in the struggle between the Light and the Ba'alzamon, the Dark One. Ba'alzamon's ultimate goal is to destroy the metaphysical Wheel of Time which would cause the cycle of time and ages to stop—allowing him to rule the universe for the rest of eternity. The de-facto leaders of the Light are the Aes Sedai, an order of women able to use magic by tapping into the One Power. Men in this world are unable to perform magic due to the aforementioned global cataclysm tainting the male half of the One Power, causing any male who uses it to eventually and inevitably go insane and cause chaos and destruction to their surroundings. The plot revolves around protagonists Rand Al'Thor, Matrim Cauthon, Perrin Aybara, Egwene al'Vere, and Nynaeve al'Meara and their role in the conflict between the Light and Ba'alzamon. When the isolated rural hometown of the protagonists is besieged by soldiers of Ba'alzamon, the group leaves to prevent further

attacks. Moiraine Damodred, an Aes Sedai, accompanies them in order to protect them and bring them to Tar Valon, the headquarters of the Aes Sedai. The protagonists play a vital role in the battle against Ba'alzamon due to them being announced as Ta'veren by a seer affiliated with the Aes Sedai. Ta'veren are people whom the Wheel of Time weaves a Web of Destiny around, making them crucial to events in the timeline. The first novel details their perilous journey from city to city in order to reach Tar Valon, concluding with a diversion into the Great Blight in order to protect an important location known as The Eye of the World. Along this journey they are constantly chased by an enemy army and encounter many obstacles, including an extremist religious order. Later books detail more of the main characters' journeys and exploits leading up to the final battle against Ba'alzamon in the fourteenth book. After viewing much more of the world and expanding their knowledge of it, many of the characters question their previously undoubted beliefs along with the concept of predetermination throughout their lives. Throughout his fantasy series *The Wheel of Time*, Robert Jordan draws parallels to several modern day matters such as radical religion, fate, and truth decay.

Religion is central to the conflict in *The Wheel of Time*. The entire main conflict centers around the struggle of good versus evil. The vast majority of the world believes in the religion revolving around the Wheel of Time, the Light, and the Shadow. The Wheel of Time is the seven-spoked cosmic loom that controls time by weaving the Great Pattern, using the lives of people as threads. The Light is the good aura that comes from a pure soul that believes in the Creator, a metonym for the God of Christianity. The Shadow is the

tainted essence of Ba'alzamon, a representation of Satan. However, within this generic religion, drastic differences separate most people. The Children of the Light, a religious militia, are extremely intolerant towards anyone who they believe don't walk in the light. Near the start of their journey, Rand laughs when some Children of the Light get their white cloaks splashed with mud on the streets of a city. The soldiers notice this, march up to him, and start to interrogate him about mocking them and Rand's supposed connection to evil, proclaiming "' You avoid my questions,' [the soldier] snapped. ' What evil is in you that you do not answer me? Does fear of the light hold your tongue?'... One of the others drew his sword... and spoke in a voice quivering with anger" (Jordan 225). Readers can clearly see that the Children of the Light use religion as an excuse to terrorize and abuse people who they dislike. In this particular confrontation, the men harass him for allegedly being evil even though nothing suggests this other than his silence and humor at a funny situation. Through this, Jordan depicts people who use their religion as a reason to attack others. Near the time Jordan wrote this novel, a Christian terrorist group named The Army of God carried out several attacks, both verbal and physical, on people and organizations that they believed did not adhere to the values of Christianity such as members of the LGBT community and abortion clinics (History Commons). The Army of God also harassed and attacked random people they saw that they believed to be homosexual or cultists without any evidence whatsoever. From their respective names to their organization and actions, it is clear that Jordan uses the Children of the Light to reference The Army of God and other radical religious groups in the world.

While the reference to The Army of God specifically calls out radical Christian groups, the Children of the Light are an allusion to radicalists of other religions as well. The Children of the Light often refer to The Dark One by his true name, Shai'tan, which is the name of a malevolent evil being in Islamic religion. Jordan expands on this by describing actions taken by the Children of the Light that draw striking similarities to those of radical Islam fighters. At one point the Children slaughter an entire village in order to “root a few Darkfiends out of [villages]... He wondered if the bodies had been piled outside the village or if they had been thrown into the river” (The Great Hunt 74). Jordan uses these brutal killings to parallel terrorist attacks by Islamic radicalists, who, similar to the Children of the Light, senselessly kill innocent civilians to attack those who they believe are opposed to their faith. The first message that Jordan portrays about religion can be seen through the attitudes of the rest of the Westlands. Although the Westlanders all believe in the same religion as the Children of the Light, the vast majority of them dislike the Children, referring to them as whitecloaks, an insulting nickname. One of the townsfolk describes them as “Men who tell other men how to live, causing trouble for those who don't obey” (Jordan 223). Another civilian attacks their biased interrogations and tendency to act violently on a whim, saying, “They'd swarm over this inn like murderous ants on a rumor, a whisper. Their hate is that strong, their desire to kill... You wouldn't like the way they ask questions. Whitecloak questioners assume you're guilty before they start... they don't care about finding the truth; they think they know that already” (Jordan 234). From these remarks, it can be seen that the ordinary citizen has a negative opinion of a group that claims to represent “

the will of the Light”. Circling back to the real world link, the message that Jordan is trying to deliver is clear; although many might see radicalists and terrorists as the embodiment of all of Islam, the vast majority of Muslims are peaceful, ordinary citizens that strongly disapprove of terrorists’ actions.

In *The Wheel of Time*, another prominent theme is that of fate versus free will. Although extremely rare, there are a handful of “dreamers” in the Westlands that can see the future through their dreams. One significant dreamer is Egwene Al’Vere, one of the protagonists of the series. When other characters are made aware of some of her visions, many of them question their actions and even their existence, wondering if anything they do truly matters. Writer Matt Hatch poses the question in a straightforward way, stating that “How much does that space, between the waking world and the dream world, affect them all? What role do dreams play in shaping reality?” (Hatch 1). Jordan’s separation of the real world and the dream world emphasizes the stark contrast of the two and Hatch prompts the reader to think about how much dreams can really impact the real world. Dreams are inherently hazy and unreliable, and Jordan’s specific choice of being able to see impending events within dreams could be a metaphor for the future being mysterious and unpredictable. However, the mere fact that the future is able to be seen and predicted to an accurate extent also contradicts this theory. Hatch goes on to offer his answer to this dilemma, “Jordan’s use [of] Pattern twisting influences such as ta’veren and the destructive influence of the Dark One [acknowledges] the role of fate [in] shaping decisions and the future” (Hatch 1). In his analysis, Hatch cedes to the fact that fate is in fact predetermined in the universe due to the Pattern. Of course, ta’veren and

the chaotic nature of Ba'alzamon can affect the Pattern, meaning that events are not necessarily set in stone. Of the main characters, the one with the most vocal opinion on fate is Rand. Rand refuses to believe that he is bound by fate and, when hearing Egwene's latest dreams, he says " This is all foolishness... I really don't have time, certainly not for any more fool talk... It is nothing" (Jordan 230). Rand strongly believes that he is the master of his own destiny, and he's right in a way as he is a ta'veren. Seeing how distraught some of his other companions are at the thought of not controlling their own futures, he attempts to rally them and dismiss Egwene's concerns. Critic Jason Denzel also agrees with Rand that the predictions are insignificant, but uses a different argument. He says, " The Wheel of Time [is] about the struggle of humanity in a time of crisis... at the end of the day, this is the story of a world. Not a person. Rather, the theme that is becoming more and more apparent is that of acceptance" (Denzel 1). Denzel argues that whether or not the characters are in control of their own destinies is irrelevant, as the story is about the world at large rather than them as individuals. He contends that Jordan's message, supposedly about fate, isn't really about fate at all. Rather, it's about acceptance and willingness to adapt to whatever life throws their way. Support for this version of the message can also be found in The Wheel of Time. The beginning of every first chapter in every book of the series starts off as follows, " The Wheel of Time turns, and ages come and pass, leaving memories that become legend. Legends fade to myth, and even myth is long forgotten when the Age that gave it birth comes again" (Jordan 1). This worldly introduction backs Denzel's argument by showing that the story is but a mere part of a

universal timeline of epic proportions. From this perspective, it really doesn't matter if characters can control their own destiny as they cannot prevent the chaos of the Pattern, but they can adapt and face it on their feet.

Fantasy is not known to be a genre with substantial messages and themes that connect to the real world. It is stereotypically seen as the genre with knights and dragons, magic and adventure. A fun casual read, but nothing symbolic. Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* series flips all those stereotypes on their heads with many deep themes relating to the real world including religious radicalism and the role of fate. Jordan illustrates that Christian terrorism exists just as much as Islamic terrorism and reminds readers that the vast majority of religious followers are non-violent and do not support radicalists. He presents different viewpoints on predetermination and free will and leaves it up to the reader to decide which one they feel is right. In the end, Jordan's series is not just a normal fantasy series purely for entertainment. It is a series filled with serious themes and messages that leaves the mind of the reader spinning for hours to come.