

The Gathering Storm

By Robert Jordan with
Brandon Sanderson
(Orbit Books)

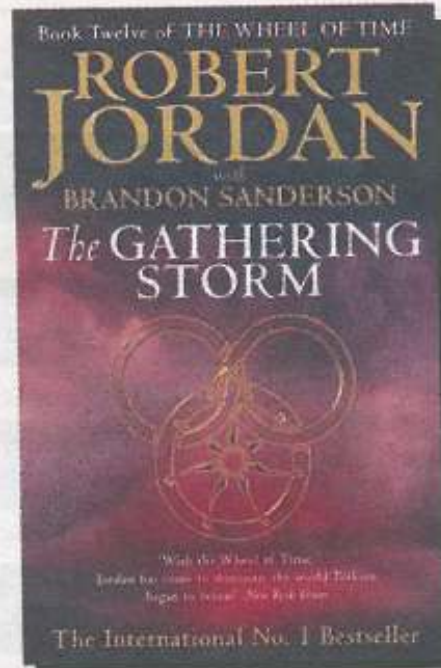
When renowned fantasy author Robert Jordan died after publishing the 11th instalment of his *Wheel of Time* series, it was clear that completing the 12-part saga would be a problem.

But fellow author Brandon Sanderson came to the rescue of fantasy fans the world over, agreeing to finish the series based on Jordan's writings and notes. Needless to say, he had a lot to live up to.

There are very few fantasy novels I would personally endorse, but the *Wheel of Time* series is top of the list – mostly because it doesn't feel like fantasy.

The story is relatively simple: you have a reluctant hero (Rand al'Thor) on a mission against a powerful adversary (the Dark One, ie the devil) in a world of magic (recast as "channelling") and numerous villains who conveniently come at our hero one at a time.

But Robert Jordan made this all plausible and fascinating. His enormous cast of characters were likable and not very heroic. They bickered with each other, they had to put up with fools, and deal with allies who could think of nothing else than use the approaching "Last Battle" to further their own ambition. On top of this, Jordan was a master of character development and description.



There are very few fantasy novels I would personally endorse, but the *Wheel of Time* series is top of the list - mostly because it doesn't feel like fantasy

However, even allowing that Sanderson's task was not easy, *The Gathering Storm* fell a bit short for me at first. The initial 300 pages are a thinly veiled recap of the previous eleven books in the series – incredibly boring if you've already read them and, seriously, who starts reading a series at the end?

Moreover, the characters are less nuanced, the dialogue more hackneyed, the villains more easily defeated, and clichéd fantasy vocabulary like "quest" surfaces.

But the last 500 pages make up for all of this. The main premise of the series is that Rand needs to die fighting the Dark One to save the world. Not only is this hardly something to look forward to, but the pressure to live up to expectations – and years of dealing with those who see him as little more than a shield between themselves and evil – are beginning to wear on him. To Rand, winning the Last Battle is looking almost as grim as him losing it!

Rand's internal struggle is the best thing about this book, but some well-plotted assassinations of his arch-enemies and a three-way showdown between factions of Aes Sedai (female channellers) and the Seanchan (foreign invaders – yes, this series is very complicated) in the latter half rescue it from the yawning abyss of mediocrity.



Roslyn Fuller is the author of political thriller *ISAK*.

More information about the Canadian, her work and the

Irish Writers' Exchange can be found at www.irishwriters-exchange.com