

## The Path of Daggers

by Robert Jordan  
(Tor Fantasy)

BY MELISSA DOUCETTE

The beginning of Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* series is one of the most promising fantasy series to be published in decades. The plot is written in the convention of such epics as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Edding's *The Belgariad*, and Weis and Hickman's widely popular *Dragonlance* series. Basically, an apocalyptic confrontation occurs between good and evil, and one man and/or group is responsible for saving the world.

However, it is in the depth of characterization where Jordan rises above his contemporaries. Each of his characters has a distinct personality, complete with quirks and flaws that captures and compels the reader's attention. Also, the women characters have particular presence, strength, and im-

portance to a degree that I have rarely seen. The plot was originally smooth and easy to follow – a difficult task in a series that spans over 4000 pages, and once the story snags you, it is difficult to disengage from. Unfortunately, since the sixth book, the series has been in a steady decline, and *The Path of Daggers* is no exception. The action and plot are meandering to the level of pointlessness, and crucial details are glossed over. The first five novels, at least, have a strong and definite focus, but *Daggers* is too diffused. It tries to explore too many storylines, and the novel's coherence suffers as a result.

The formerly high level of characterization demonstrated in earlier novels is also lacking. The three main characters of the series are barely referred to, and one is absent entirely. As well, the women have mostly

become flat, irritating, and predictable, having lost much of the vivacity and originality that animated them. And Rand Al'Thor – the central character that the novel and its world hinges on – has undergone a complete character reversal in his efforts to reach the Last Battle. He has become unyielding and merciless, although not without cause, and many of his endearing qualities have been lost along the way. Even though this change is alluded to by some of the other characters, by the eighth novel it becomes more difficult to sustain a high sense of compassion for him.

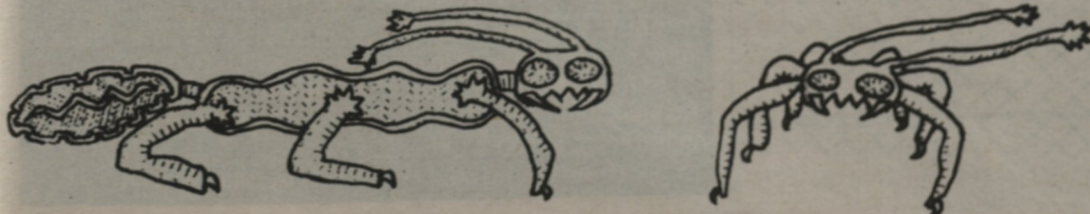
Finally, *Daggers* is really a book for hardcore fans of the *Wheel of Time* series. I would, however, highly recommend at least the first five books, starting with *The Eye of the World*. At around \$35 a pop, wait for *Daggers* to come out in softcover.

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