

Ad Astra, Toronto, May 5th-7th, 2017

First Q&A: 9:36

Q: What's the etymology of slontz?

B: I wanted a fake yiddish word. So I mentioned something like this. It doesn't quite fit but I wanted to have the feel of it and came up with this.

Q:

Reading: 18:00

The ship, First Dreams, crashed through a wave prompting Kaza to cling tightly to the rigging. Her gloved hands already ached, and she was certain each new wave would toss her overboard. She refused to go down below. This was her destiny. She was not a thing to be carried from place to place. Not any longer. Besides, that dark sky--suddenly stormy even though the sailing had been easy up until an hour ago--was no more disconcerting than her visions.

Another wave sent water crashing across the deck. Sailors scrambled and screamed. Mostly hirelings out of steam, as no rational crew would make this trip. Captain Varsmeb stalked among them while Draws, the helmsmen, kept them on a steady heading. Into the storm. Straight. Into. The Storm.

Kaza held tight, feeling her age as her arms started to weaken. Icy water washed over her, pushing back the hood of her robe, exposing her face and its twisted nature. Most sailors weren't paying attention, though her cry did bring Varsmeb's attention. The only Thaylen on board, the captain didn't much match her image of the people. Thaylens to her were portly little men in vests. Merchants with styled hair who haggled over every last sphere. Varsmeb however was tall as an Alethi, with hands wide enough to palm boulders and forearms large enough to lift them. Over the crashing waves he yelled, "Someone get that soulcaster down below deck!"

"No!" she shouted back at him. "I stay!"

"I didn't pay a prince's ransom to bring you," he said stalking up to her, "only to lose you over the side."

"I am not a thing to--"

"Captain!" a sailor shouted. "Captain!"

They both looked up as the ship peaked over the tip of a huge wave, then teetered before just kind of falling over the side.

Storms! Kaza's stomach practically squeezed up into her throat, and she felt her fingers sliding on the ropes. Varsmeb seized her by the side of her robe, holding her tight as they plunged into the water beyond the wave. For a brief terrifying moment they seemed intombed in the chill water. As if the entire ship had sunk.

The wave passed and Kaza found herself in a sodden heap on the floor of the deck, held by the captain.

"Storming fool!" he said to her. "You're my secret weapon. You drown yourself when you're not in my pay, understand?"

She nodded limply and then realized with a shock she'd been able to hear him easily. The storm... was gone? Varsmeb stood up straight grinning broadly, his white eyebrows combed back along his long mane of dripping hair. All across the deck sailors who had survived climbed to their feet, dripping wet and staring at the sky. It maintained its overcast gloom, but the winds had fallen completely still. Varsmeb bellowed out a laugh, sweeping back his long curling hair, "What did I tell you men? That new storm came from Aimia. Now it is gone and escaped, leaving the riches of its homeland to be plundered."

Everyone knew you didn't linger long around Aimia, though everyone had a different explanation as to why. Some rumors told of a vengeful storm here. One that sought out and destroyed approaching ships. The strange wind they'd encountered, which didn't match the timing of a highstorm, seemed to support that.

The captain started shouting orders, getting the men back into position. They hadn't been sailing long, only a short distance out from Liafor, up the Shin coast, then westward toward this northern section of Aimia. They'd soon spotted the large main island, but had not visited it. Everyone knew that was barren and lifeless. The treasures were hidden on the island--supposedly lying in wait to enrich those brave enough approach through winds and treacherous straits.

She cared less for that. What were riches to her? She had come because of another rumor. One spoken only among her kind. Perhaps here, at last, she could find a cure for her condition. Even as she righted herself she felt in her pouch, seeking the comforting touch of her soulcaster. Hers--no matter what the rulers of Liafor claimed. Had they spent their youths caressing it, learning its secrets? Had they spent their middle years in service, stepping with each use closer and closer to oblivion? The common sailors gave Kaza's face [...] refusing to look her in the eyes. She pulled her hood up, unaccustomed to the eyes of ordinary people. She'd entered the stage where her disfigurements were starkly obvious. Kaza was slowly becoming smoke.

Varsmeb took the helm himself, giving Draws a break. The lanky man stepped down from the poop deck, noticing her by the side of the ship. He grinned at her, which she found curious. She had never spoken to him, but now he sauntered over to her as if he intended to make *small talk*.

“So...” he said, “up on deck through that? You’ve got guts.”

She hesitated, considering this strange creature then lowered her hood. He didn’t flinch, even though her hair, ears, and now parts of her face were disintegrating. There was a hole in her cheek through which you could see her jaw and teeth. Lines of smoke ringed the hole. The flesh seemed to be burning away. Air passed through when she spoke, altering her voice, and she had to tip her head all the way back to drink anything. Even then some dribbled out. The process was slow. She had a few years left before the soulcasting killed her. [?] And intent on proving nothing was wrong.

“I can’t believe we got through that storm. You think it hunts ships like they say?” He was Liaforan like herself with deep brown skin and dark brown eyes. What *did* he want? She tried to remember the ordinary passions of human life which she’d begun to forget. *Is it sex you want? No, you’re much younger than I am. Hmm... Curious. Are you frightened and wishing for comfort?* He started to fidget, playing with the end of a tied off rope.

“Umm... So... I mean, the prince sent you right?”

Ah! So he knew that she was the prince’s cousin.

“You wish to connect yourself to royalty. Well, I came on my own.”

“Surely he let you go.”

“Of course he didn’t. If not for my safety and that of my device.” It was hers. She looked off across the too still ocean. “They locked me up each day. Gave me any comforts they assumed would keep me happy. They realized that at any moment I could literally make the walls and bonds turn to smoke.”

“Does it hurt?”

“It is blissful. I slowly connect to the device and through it to Roshar until one day it will take me fully into its embrace.” She lifted a hand and pulled her black glove off one finger at a time, revealing that it too was disintegrating. Five lines of darkness, one rising from the tip of each finger. She turned it, palm toward him. “I could show you. Feel my touch and you could know. One moment and then you will mingle with the air itself.”

He fled. *Excellent.*

The captain steered them toward a small island poking out from the placid ocean right where the captain’s map said it would be. It had dozens of names: the Rock of Secrets, the Void’s Playground. So melodramatic. She preferred the old name for the place: Akinah. Supposedly there had once been a grand city here. But who would put a city on an island you couldn’t approach? For jutting out of the ocean were such strange rock formations. They ringed the entire island. Each some forty feet tall, resembling spearheads.

As they drew closer the sea grew choppy again and she felt a bout of nausea. She liked that. It was a human feeling. She again felt for her soulcaster. The nausea mixed with a faint sense of hunger. Food was something she often forgot about these days. As her body needed less of it now. Chewing was annoying with the hole in her cheek. Still, she liked the scents from whatever the cook was stirring up below. Perhaps the meal would calm the men, who seemed agitated to approach the island.

Kaza moved to the front of the ship, near the captain.

"Now you earn your keep soulcaster," he said. "And I'll feel justified in calling you all the way out here."

"I am not a thing to be used," she said absently. "I am a person. Those spikes of stone. They were soulcast there." The enormous stone spearheads were too even in a ring about the island. Judging by the currents ahead, some lurked beneath the waters as well, to rip the hulls of approaching vessels.

"Can you destroy them?" The captain asked her.

"No. They are much larger than you indicated."

"But--"

"I can make a hole in them captain. It is much easier to soulcast an entire object, but I am no ordinary soulcaster. I have begun to see the dark sky and the second sun and the creatures that lurk hidden around the cities of men."

He shivered visibly. Why should that have frightened him? She'd merely stated facts.

"We need you to transform the tips of a few under the waves," he said. "And make a hole at least large enough for the dinghies to get through to the island beyond."

"I will keep my word, but you must remember: I do not serve you. I am here for my own purposes."

They weighed anchor as close to the spikes as they dared to get. They were even more daunting, and more obviously soulcast, from up close. *Each would require several soulcasters in concert*, she thought, standing at the crown of the boat as the men ate a hasty meal of stew. The cook was a woman. Reshi from the looks of her, with tattoos all over her face. She forced the captain to eat, claiming that if he went in hungry he'd be distracted. Even Kaza took some, though her tongue no longer tasted food. It all felt like the same mush to her, and she ate with a napkin pressed to her cheek.

The captain drew anticipationspren as he waited--ribbons that waved in the wind--and Kaza could see the beasts beyond, the creatures that accompanied the spren. The ship's four dinghies were cramped with rowers and officers altogether, but they made space for her at the

front. She pulled up her hood, which still hadn't dried, and sat on her bench. What had the captain been planning to do if the storm hadn't stopped? Would he seriously have tried to use her in a dinghy to remove the spearheads [?] in the middle of the tempest?

They reached the first of them, and Kaza carefully unwrapped her soulcaster. Releasing a flood of light. Three large gemstones connected by chains with loops for fingers. She pulled it on, with gemstones on the back of the palm. She sighed softly to feel the metal against her skin. Warm. Welcoming. A part of her.

She reached over the side into the chilled water and pressed her hand against the tip of a stone spear. Smooth from years in the ocean. Light from the gemstones lit the water, reflections dancing across her row. She closed her eyes and felt the familiar feeling of being drawn into another world. Of another will reinforcing her own. Something commanding and powerful, drawn by her request for aid. The stone did not wish to change. It was content with its long slumber in the ocean. But yes... Yes, it remembered. It had once been air until someone had locked it into this shape. She could not make it air again, her soulcaster only had one mode--not the full three. She did not know why.

"Smoke," she whispered to the stone. "Freedom in the air, remember?" She tempted it. Picking at its memories of dancing free. "Yes, freedom." She nearly gave in herself. How wonderful it would be to no longer fear. To soar into infinity on the air. To be free of mortal pains.

The tip of the stone burst into smoke, sending an explosion of bubbles up around the dinghy. Kaza was shocked back into the real world and a deep piece within her trembled. Terrified. She'd almost gone that time.

Smoke bubbles rattled the dinghy, which nearly upended. She should have warned them. Soldiers muttered, but in the next dinghy over the captain praised her. She removed two more spear tips beneath the waves before finally reaching the wall. Here the spearhead like formations had been grown so close together there was barely a hand between them. It took three tries to get the dinghy close enough. As soon as they got into position some turning of the waves would pull them back away again. Finally, the sailors managed to keep her steady.

She reached out with the soulcaster. Two of the three gems were almost out of stormlight, and glowed just faintly. But she should have enough. She pressed her hand against the spike, then convinced it to become smoke. It was easy this time. She felt the explosion of wind from the transformation. Her soul crying in delight at the smoke, thick and sweet. She breathed it in through the hole in her cheek while sailors coughed. She looked up at the smoke drifting away. *How wonderful it would be... No. No.*

The island proper loomed beyond that hole. Dark like its stones had been stained by the smoke itself. It had tall rock formations along its center, that looked almost like the walls of a city. The captain's dinghy pulled up to her and the captain transferred to her boat. His began to row backward toward the ship.

“What?” she asked. “Why are the others heading back?”

“They claim to not be feeling well,” the captain said. Was he abnormally pale? “Cowards! They won’t have any of the prize then!”

“Gemstones lay just for the plucking here,” Draws added. “Generations of greatshells have died here, leaving their hearts. We’re going to be rich men!”

Well, as long as the secret was here she didn’t care. She settled into her place in the prow of the dinghy as the sailors guided the three small vessels through the gap. The Aimians had known about soulcasters. This is where you’d come to get the devices in the old days. You’d come to the ancient isle of Akinah. If there was some secret of how to avoid death by the device she loved, she would find it here.

Her stomach began acting up again as they rowed. Kaza endured it, though she felt as if she were slipping into another world. That wasn’t an ocean beneath her but deep black glass. And two suns in the sky—one that drew her soul toward it. Her shadow was stretched out the wrong direction.

Splash. She started. One of the sailors had slipped from his boat into the water. She gasped as another slumped to the side, oar falling from his fingers.

“Captain?” She turned to find him with drooping eyes. He slumped, then fell backward unconscious, knocking his head on the back seat of the boat. The other sailors weren’t doing any better. The two dinghies had begun to drift. Not a single sailor seemed to be conscious.

My destiny, Kaza thought. My choice. Not a thing to be carted from place to place and ordered to soulcast. Not a tool. A person.

She shoved aside an unconscious sailor and took the oars herself. It was difficult work. She was unaccustomed to physical labor, and her fingers had trouble gripping. They started to dissolve further. Perhaps a year or two was optimistic for her survival. Still she rode. She fought the waves until she at long last got close enough to hop out into the water and feel the rock beneath her feet. Her robes billowing up around her as she finally thought to check if Varsmeb was alive. None of the sailors in her dinghy were breathing, so she let the boat slip back along the waves. Alone, Kaza fought through the surf and finally on hands and knees crawled up onto the stones of the island. There she collapsed, drowsy. Why was she so sleepy?

She awoke to a small cremling scuttling across the rocks near her. It had a strange shape, with large wings and a head that made it look like an axehound. Its carapace shimmered with dozens of colors. Kaza could remember a time when she had collected cremlings, pinning them to boards and claiming she would become a natural historian. What had happened to that girl? She was transformed by necessity. Given a soulcaster which was always kept in the royal family. Given a charge, and a death sentence. She stirred and the cremling scrambled away. She coughed, then began to crawl towards those rock formations. That city. Dark city of stone.

She could barely think as she passed it--a large uncut gemheart among the bleached white carapace leftovers of a dead greatshell. Varsmeb had been right.

She collapsed again near the perimeter of the rock formations. They looked like large, ornate buildings crusted with crem.

"Ah," a voice said from behind her, "I should have guessed the drug would not affect you as quickly. You *are* barely human anymore." Kaza rolled over and found someone approaching on quiet bare feet. The cook? Yes, that was her, with the tattooed face.

"You...", Kaza croaked, "You poisoned us!"

"After many warnings not to come to this place," the cook said. "It is rare I must guard it so aggressively. Men must not again discover this place."

"The gemstones?" Kaza asked, growing more drowsy. "You protect them? Or is it... something else? Something... more."

"I cannot speak," the cook said. "Even to sate a dieing demand. There are those who can pull secrets from your soul, and the cost would be the ends of worlds. Sleep now soulcaster. This is the most merciful end I can give."

The cook began to hum. Pieces of her broke off, becoming cremplings. She crumbled into a pile of chittering little insects that moved out of her clothing, leaving them in a heap.

Hallucination? Kaza wondered as she drifted. She was dying. Well, that was nothing new. The cremplings began to pick at her hand, taking off her soulcaster. *No*.

She had one last thing to do. With a defiant shout she pressed the rocky ground beneath her and demanded a change. When it became smoke she went with it. Her choice. Her destiny.

Second Q&A: 39:14

Signing Line:

[8:40]

Q: Do you have another magic system that you haven't written about yet?

B: [Talks about the magic where you get a disease and a power, don't know if there's any new info]

[10:07]

Q: In Shadows of Self, Paalm tells Wax she's killed his father, she hasn't killed his mother yet. Is Wax's father still alive?

B: Umm, that was not who she was referencing.

Q: Was it Marasi's father? Cause that was what Wax assumed?

B: Yeah, it is what he assumed, yeah... No, no, no, no, no, it's not what he assumed, sorry. She was talking about something else completely--Not Wax's father and not Marasi's father. Sorry, I had to work through that scene. There is a different reference there.

Q: Is it the one that it turns out to be? Is that what she was talking about? Or is there more trick there that we don't know yet?

B: No, don't work too hard on this.

[11:16]

[Wheel of Time question that I'm skipping for now]

[Akk spoilers for WoT! At 31:00]

[33:08]

Q: What does it mean for an object to be considered "Invested"?

B: That is a matter of some discussion among scientists. Usually it means to most of them, like a...Let me see if I can explain this. So, all things are built from Investiture, right? When they're using "Invested", they're talking about kind of like saturating a solution, in that, yes it's being built out of this material, but now there's more it in. It's a little bit like supersaturation, but not quite.

Q: It's kind of like more Investiture in the Spirit Web or the Cognitive...

B: Yeah, more than just the creation of it. There's lingering Investiture that could be drawn out, or stuffed in.

Q: But there are limits, right?

B: There are limits. We kind of run into that kind of thing with Feruchemy a little bit. But yes.

[34:32]

Q: [Garbled. Question about Compounding.]

B: [Hands RAFO Card]

[41:30]

Q: I did have a question regarding Jasnah's name. What was the origin for it?

B: So, Jasnah's name *predates* most of the language work that I did. It comes from ancient Semitic languages, playing around with those, and then her name became one of the ones that I built the language around. Because, after I had named her, and then written the whole book (I'd named her and Dalinar), Kaladin's name changed once I'd rebuilt the linguistics; Shallan's name changed once I'd rebuilt the linguistics, but Dalinar and Jasnah kinda became the origins. It's a blend of Arabic and Hebrew.

Q: Because I had an interesting tidbit. "Jasnah" in Polish actually means "bright".

[more linguistic talk about Polish]

[43:29] *Paraphrased*

Q: Will Rysn be in Oathbringer

B: Yes.

[44:27]

Q: Question for you, regarding Nalthis. Do the Priests use a sharp object to get the Divine Breath from the God King?

B: Oh, you're asking if it's Hemalurgy. It is not, but that is a good question. I'm surprise no one's asked that before.

[45:22]

Q: Is anyone going to use a wormhole to worldhop?

B: There's your RAFO!

[49:12]

Q: What is your favourite and least favourite thing about Hoid?

B: My favourite thing about him is he doesn't care...He's able to have the right amount of caring of what people think about him. He's able to control perception. My least favourite is that he can be a very not-nice person.

[51:24]

Q: Is there any other magic types on the Warbreaker world?

B: So...There are different manipulations and manifestations of Breath. They're gonna be much closer than the Selish magic systems and things like that. So, the deviation is much smaller, but it does manifest in *slightly* different ways.

Q: Have we seen any?

B: Uhhh, RAFO!

[53:28]

Q: Does the Lord Ruler have children?

B: So I've been dodgy about this before, but the answer is yes, the Lord Ruler did have children. I don't think I've--I've *strongly* hinted at it, so I think people basically know. But yes. But it is *children*.

[56:59]

Q: What's the title for the next book? [Alcaztraz 6]

B: So right now it is named--Right now it says "Alcatraz versus the Evil Librarians" but the "Alcatraz" is crossed out and says "Bastille" and underneath it says "versus his own dumb self". Uhh, it's the title I'm going with right now, but it might change. But it's called "Alcatraz versus his own dumb self".

Q: When you're writing an Alcatraz book how long does it take to write the First Draft?

B: The First Draft usually takes about two months. They can be a lot faster than my other books.

[101:00]

Q: I asked at the panel, about Hoid?

B: You will be getting a trilogy about his history and backstory.