WANTED: Dragon David

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With characters from Brandon Sanderson’s Mistborn Era 1.5

It was strange, August thought, how these small communities could pop up in the middle of one of the most dang inhospitable valleys he had ever seen. The transcontinental railroad that had been finished earlier this year passed to the north, just above Salt Lake, but few of these towns farther to the south ever saw those people. August's boots squelched slightly as he pulled them from the wet mud that made up the streets, and had to step aside quickly for a dang horse and buggy.

These towns were some sort of odd mixture between the wild, wild areas he had ridden the train through and the huge metropolises of the East coast. August had always longed for adventure in the frontier, and hated the scheming society and lavish luxury he had left. Still, August thought as he pulled his new, wide-brimmed hat down farther to block the burning sun, there was something to be said for the simplicity and loyalty of a community held together by faith, as many places far to the south of the Great Salt Lake City were.

August hoped that nobody could tell that he was new to the frontier, though there was no hiding the fact that he was new to the town. He had taken special care to groom his clothing and hair, going so far as to purchase used coats and belts from men who had gotten back to "civilization" and wanted nothing more to do with the West. Despite the nagging and disapproval of his younger sister, who wasn't really so young any more, August had spent a few months before his planned departure growing out his curly black hair and a sort of

half-shaven beard. Of course, Maybelle hadn’t known he was scheming to leave. She would have been horrified, especially if she had found out it was dang *Utah* he was counting on going.

Although August was well aware that most of those who attempted the journey to Utah these days, and even through the entirety of the territory’s past, he thought with a chuckle, were people planning to convert or join their converted family, August had no intention of investigating the crazy church most Utahns seemed to belong to. It was a bit of a contradiction, he mused.

This whole valley was a contradiction. Lush, green mountains but completely dry soil save for the few rivers that crisscrossed the land. West of the wildest dang places August knew but almost civilized itself. Men and natives working very nearly side-by-side. Near-totally religious, but a safe harbor to some nasty people. Thieves of the worst kind, murderers, and the men who chased them. Like August.

As August stepped off the street and into the forest - surprisingly dense just after a few steps - he swung the lumpy burlap bag he had just purchased off of his shoulder. He walked like that for a few minutes, bag swinging from his big hand, following the (hopefully) inconspicuous markers he had left for himself, until he finally heard the crackle of pine needles that only horseshoes could make. He was headed in the wrong dang direction, but only by a

little. Quickly, August rectified his course before his companion Owen could notice.

Owen, a short man, sat idly on the thick carpet of pine needles, leaning up against a roll of supplies with his hat - a nice, used one that was terribly out of place with the rest of his dusty clothing - over his eyes. August stepped into the campsite, glanced at the two horses tied to a tree, and kicked Owen. He set down the burlap bag and pulled a roll of canvas from the pile Owen was leaning on. Owen picked his hat up to show August the scowl he was wearing, then stood up.

“I was awake,” he grumbled, dusting off his pants. That didn’t help them much. “There was no need to pull that away.”

“You were,” August grunted, sliding a roll of treated canvas out of the bag, “supposed to set this thing up while I was away.”

“Nuh-uh,” Owen whined as he squatted next to the burlap bag August had dropped. “You said you’d do it when you got back.” He grinned as he started pulling things out. He fingered a shiny gold pocket watch, opening it and tapping its glass. “Anyway, there was sleepin’ that needed to be done.” Owen pulled a dang rock out of his pocket, put it in the burlap bag, and slid the pocket watch into his coat.

Rolling his eyes, August snatched a piece of rope from the burlap bag and tied it, stretched between the boughs of two pine trees. “Come on, Owen,” he said. “You know that I need your help for

this part.” August unrolled the treated canvas and draped it over the stretched rope, hoping that the knots would hold.

Reluctantly, Owen walked over to August and together, they stretched the canvas down the sides of the rope, making a triangle. Owen let go to grab the large metal nails that had fallen from the canvas bag, and the tent cover flapped back over the rope towards August. Grumbling, August draped the cloth back over the rope and accepted the nails Owen handed to him. They sweated to pound the nails through the corners of the canvas and into the ground, and it was a lot later that they stood back to admire their work.

“What took you so long, anyway?” Owen asked August, unrolling the bed rolls, from the pile he had been leaning on, under the tent.

“I was looking at the wanted posters,” August answered. He began to set stones in a circle around a slight pit they had dug earlier.

Owen chortled. “Bet they were for things like ‘drinking’ and ‘making too much noise’, eh?”

“A little,” August admitted. “They weren’t as dangerous crimes as I saw coming out here, but they’re still worth catching.”

Owen glanced over slyly. “Big reward?” He had settled himself down on the pine needles again, watching August pile wood for the fire.

“Not particularly. You know, you could be helping,” August said. “Open one of the cans in the bag and pour it into the pot I got.” He squatted down and attempted to spark some of the kindling he had

piled on top of the wood. Owen stabbed his knife into the top of a can and awkwardly cut out the top. He looked around for the pot, then finally thought to look in the bag. The cans that had been piled inside clanged loudly as Owen dumped them out with one hand.

Finally, the fire was going and heating the can of beans Owen had sort of prepared. The night was still and crickets rang through the pine trees. The beans bubbled a little and Owen snored softly. August finally had time to think over his plan. He had decided to go after Dragon David, who was reported for setting fire to various buildings around the area. In fact, many of the locals were convinced that it was a dragon who was doing the damage, though directed by the man whose face was on the poster. August wasn't sure *what* the man must actually be doing. Perhaps he was distracting people with a puppet and then committing the arson? Perhaps. August was sure that there was no actual dragon.. Dragons didn't exist. This Dragon David must -

A huge *crack!* rang through the night, setting many birds in a big cloud up through the sky. August leapt up, and Owen stirred. It sounded like a gunshot, or maybe a tree that had been snapped by huge claws - no. Dragons didn't exist.

August's convictions were sorely tested the next moment, when a huge head appeared through the trees. It was shining gold, perhaps five feet long, and had long purple horns. A young, good-looking man with metallic, golden hair that nearly matched his dragon stood to

the dragon’s immediate left. He was old enough to grow facial hair and not look like a pansy, but he didn’t seem to know how to take care of it. August kicked Owen up.

“What the…” wondered Owen, standing and slamming his hat on his head. He turned to August. “Didn’t we see one of those gold shiny things on our way here? It was on top of that one huge castle thing in Great Salt Lake City, wasn’t it?”

The kid by the dragon snorted. “Right. That thing’s a statue, fool. My dragon is so much more than a cold statue that doubles as a lightning rod. She *is* the lightning.” The boy grinned wickedly. His voice had an obvious, though mild, accent. August couldn’t name it, though admittedly, he hadn’t heard too many foreign accents.

August eyed the kid warily. “Are *these* what that crazy church is about?” he asked, gesturing towards the gold dragon.

The boy snorted again. He liked doing that. “No,” he said. “Not at all.”

“Then who are you?”

With a dangerous glint in his eyes, the kid just smiled. It was a creepy smile - one that probably would have been used for genuine amusement, but now, it was more like the kid was laughing at August, thinking him a naive child for not knowing. August hated that. The kid was a contradiction, looking so young but with the condescension of an adult to a toddler.

“You don’t want to know,” the young man said.

“I think I have a guess. David.”

The kid’s face twisted with dark amusement. “No. I think the people just like alliteration. My name is actually Abraham.” He shoved his hands into his long duster’s pockets. August tensed, ready for a gun to be pulled on him. “And I don’t like you.”

“So you’re going to kill us.” August slowly eased his gun in the holster he wore. Usually he took the belt off at night, but had been too distracted by setting up camp to bother with it tonight.

“Heck no. Well, maybe,” Abraham allowed. He leaned up against his dragon’s leg. The thing shifted a bit to allow him to do so. “Depends on if you agree to my demands or not.” Abraham looked straight at August and his gun. “That little thing won’t work. Not on me, not on Bob-girl here.”

August flipped the gun up and pulled the trigger. “Worth a shot,” he shrugged as the bullet flew and hit Abraham straight on the chest - August was no amateur - but bounced off the kid. August had no idea what just happened, but he was nothing if he couldn’t adapt to an unusual situation and find a way out of it. He noticed that Owen was no longer next to him. Owen had interesting ways of making sure nobody noticed him. August didn’t know what he was up to, but figured he might want to keep the Abraham kid distracted.

“Bob-girl?” August raised his eyebrow, keeping his pistol trained at the pair. If Owen was doing something to help, and August

was reasonably sure he was, August needed to be ready for… whatever it was.

“My little sister named her,” Abraham explained. “Now Bob-girl answers to nothing else, no matter how hard I try.” The kid was cocky to be holding such a casual posture when he had a gun on him. Either that, or very confident in whatever protections he had. *I would be, too, actually,* August thought, eyeing the dragon. She was riffling through the pine needles with her nose, occasionally turning her head to get a closer look at the ground or at Abraham. Strangely, to August at least, she seemed playful.

“Anyway,” Abraham continued, expression hardening. “There are some things I need done, old man.” August sniffed at that. “You seem like the perfect person to do them. After that, you’re going to leave the frontier totally.”

“I will, huh? And what makes you think I’m going to do that?” August’s arms were beginning to ache from holding his pistol up for so long, but at this point, lowering it would be backing down. *Hurry up, Owen,* he said internally.

Abraham said something, but it seemed to be in a different language. Almost German, though not quite. If the few times he had heard some were enough to judge, August might have believed it was Asian. German or Asian… Russian? No way.

In the time August had been distracted by the language, the dragon … Bob-girl … had swung her head around so her right eye was

pointed directly at August. There was intelligence in those eyes. The shining gold of Bob-girl’s scales seemed to light up the velvety black sky like the sun. Bob-girl turned her gaze away from August and towards the tent he and Owen had spent so long trying to set up. Her body expanded a very small amount, cracking the trunks of the trees that were pressed into her from all sides. Bob-girl exhaled, sending a flurry of sparks towards the canvas, which, thankfully, didn’t catch. August had made sure that the tent was spark resistant.

The dragon tried again, this time producing a small stream of flame, rather as if one of those long matches used to light candles in chandeliers had been lit, given much more fuel, and directed sideways. The canvas may have been spark resistant, but it was not fireproof. Not by any stretch. August didn’t look at the tent. Bob-girl’s eyes remained fixated on the small bonfire, and August was watching her. It seemed that any second she might turn and burn him as easily as the tent, yet at the same time she looked like a statue, intent to stay in one position forever. A contradiction.

“That’s why,” Abraham crowed, shaking August out of his trance. “First of all, you have no tent now. I’m very much mistaken if you have money for an inn or for more supplies, especially for the duration you intend. Second of all, I have now shown you a small amount of what Bob-girl can really do. Don’t even think of running,” he added, noticing August glance toward the trees around him and

misunderstanding it. August was simply wondering where Owen had gone. “In case you forgot, Bob-girl can *fly*. You won’t last long running.”

August’s arms were really starting to burn. “Fine,” he relented, partly because of his arms and that pride shared by so many men, partly because he needed to keep Abraham and Bob-girl distracted so they wouldn’t notice the attack by Owen August was steadily losing hope in, and partly because he really was intimidated and not sure he could get out of this any other way. He was sure that if Abraham continued the way he seemed to be headed, he would certainly become quite the criminal mastermind, despite his outward heroic appearance. Another contradiction.

Another noise cracked the night, somehow duller but more piercing than the cracking of trees had been: flapping dragon wings. August, Abraham, and Bob-girl looked up sharply. A huge dragon the color of oak leaves in the fall swooped into view. There was a large man sitting just behind the base of its neck. He shouted something in the language Abraham had used earlier to speak to Bob-girl. When bellowed like that, it sounded more like what August thought a dragon’s roar would be than a language at all.

The new dragon pounded into the clearing, effectively destroying what little was left of August and Owen’s campsite. The fire snuffed with the wind, though it had only been burning halfheartedly in the first place. Dang fire. The man on top of the dragon, which was

dappled yellow and olive now that August really got a good look at it, continued shouting, directing the brunt of his voice at Abraham.

Sliding off the dragon seemed easy for this man, though August really had thought it would take longer to dismount… if that's what you called getting off a dang *dragon*. The man, who seemed just as large next to his mount as Abraham did to Bob-girl, which was saying something because dang, that dragon must have been three times as large as Bob-girl, thumped over to Abraham. The kid looked thouroughly cowed. Then the man turned to August, his face still red and his huge beard bristling.

"Eh, he's not really that scary," said Owen, shoving his hands into his pockets. August turned his gun on his friend in reflex, then put it down once he registered who was standing next to him.

"What happened to you? Where did you go?" August demanded, trying to position himself so he could keep an eye on all the inhabitants of the clearing, dang dragons included, which meant he backed into a tree.

Owen shrugged in his characteristic way and straightened his hat. "Didn't figure I could do anything about a dragon, so I ran for it, shouting about dragons the whole way up the hill. Apparently this guy," here Owen jerked his thumb at the large, bearded man, "was looking for his kid anyway, and heard me. So he came to help."

"I am sorry," boomed the man, commanding August's attention again. "I am sorry for me boy who scared ye and destroyed yer

property. Please believe he was actin’ completely without approval and shall be punished.” His voice was much more accented than his son’s, and August almost had a hard time understanding him. The man eyed Abraham angrily, and Abraham shyed back.

“I was only trying to help with those attacks,” Abraham protested weakly. “Besides, Bob-girl is really fine out here on earth, and I figured recruiting a native-”

“Enough!” shouted Abraham’s father. “I might have let ye come on yer own, especially in time, but comin’ here now? Attackin’ villages and barns with yer dragon? *Threatenin’* a native with yer dragon? That’s plain unacceptable, boy. It’s no’ a question of if yer dragon’s okay with it, but if yer responsible enough fer it. You’ve proved to me, today, thatcha ain’t. All ye’ve done today is postpone the date of yer graduation.” Abraham went red in the face and seemed to want to protest. He opened his mouth. “*By a year*.” Horrified, Abraham looked down.

August felt something by his leg. He looked at his coat pocket to see Owen with one hand pulling out August’s pen and the other trying to slide a woman’s necklace into it. Absently, August took both his pen and the necklace out of Owen’s hands.

“Hey,” complained Owen. “I traded a good, pretty piece of twine for that necklace. You can’t take that *and* the pen. That’s not how trading works.” August rolled his eyes, put his hand in the pocket, and his gun back in its holster, to prevent any more “trading” and

looked back up. The man had just been berating Abraham more and more. August wondered whether he should, or even could, make a break for it. Then he looked at the dragons again. Bob-girl had lost interest in the conversation and was playing in the pine needles again, while the larger dragon seemed to be holding a more dignified posture to show the younger one what dragons were supposed to be like.

After a while, Abraham's father, who had slipped into what seemed to be the two's native language, seemed to remember there were other people present. He turned to August and Owen. He reached under his fur cape.

"Thank ye," he said grudgingly to Owen, "fer findin' me and takin' me to me boy." He tossed a leather bag to August, who caught it with a grunt. The dang thing must have weighed five pounds. "I assume gold is valuable here still?" he asked. Owen nodded eagerly. "Good. Fer damages, then. Sorry ye had to see us. We'll be leavin' now."

Abraham's father stumped over to his dragon as Abraham slowly mounted Bob-girl. The big man looked disapprovingly at his son. "Last time yer flyin' til Master Grendale says ye can again. Go on ahead of me, now, so I can keep an eye on ye." Abraham grimaced, but didn't look at his father or August or Owen. Bob-girl spit a few small sparks August's direction, which almost seemed like a friendly gesture, then sent a small flame straight into the air. Abraham

barked something sharp at her in their language, and Bob-girl took off.

The big man began to step onto his dragon to follow his son. “Eh,” he grunted, rubbing his beard with one hand while the other was grabbing his dragon. “It would also probably be good if you never mention this to anybody,” he told August and Owen. “Not that they’d believe ye, but… we’re already dealin’ with problems. We don’t need another. Goodbye, lads.” He finished mounting, and the yellow dragon took off without another sound.

August watched both the yellow dragon and Bob-girl leave, flying west. The sky was surprisingly dark. He had almost expected it to be dawn, or midday. The shine of the dragons really went beyond reflection, as was obvious when they continued to glow against the dark swath of silk that was the night sky. It was a contradiction.

Owen and he stayed like that for a while, watching the now-empty expanse. Eventually, they began to walk away by silent consent, untying their strangely quiet horses and riding them back into town. On the way, August looked inside the heavy leather bag he had been thrown. It was full of small gold coins. Perfect.

“Do you… do you think we *should* tell somebody?” Owen asked August quietly. August didn’t answer for a minute, thinking it through.

“Nah,” he finally said. “I don’t think anybody would believe us, like that man said, and I get the feeling that it’s probably best if we keep quiet about it. Both for our sakes and for theirs.”

“You don’t think we dreamed it all, do you?” Owen wondered. “What if we just wake up in the morning in our tent, find that the can of beans has been burned and rained on, eat it anyway, then laugh about a dream? I mean, these horses are acting unusually nice to me.”

August looked at Owen. “I’ve got a five pound weight of gold on my saddle,” he said. “That’s enough for me.” He spurred his horse on a little faster. “Let’s go see if there’s an inn still open, one that might take raw gold.”

They rode on in silence for another minute or so.

“Hey,” Owen said finally. “Can I have my necklace and pen back? I have a nice few gold coins I could trade you for them.”

“First of all, that’s *my* pen, and no, you can’t have it. And those gold coins also sort of belong to me.”

“Okay, how about a pocket watch instead? I got a nice one off an oblivious chap just earlier today. Traded a nice, solid rock for it. It’s easily worth a dinky pen and necklace I seriously doubt you’d ever wear.” Owen paused. “Actually, I’ll just take the pen if you do plan on wearing the necklace, but only if I’m there when you do.”

“*No*, Owen. Drop it.”

“But it *would* be funny to see you wear the necklace. Admit it. And you can have the pocket watch *and* the gold...”