



# The Complete Stephen King Universe: A Guide to the Worlds of Stephen King

By Stanley Wiater, Christopher Golden, Hank Wagner

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*The Complete Stephen King Universe* is the only definitive reference work that examines all of Stephen King's novels, short stories, motion pictures, miniseries, and teleplays, and deciphers the threads that exist in all of his work. This ultimate resource includes in-depth story analyses, character breakdowns, little-known facts, and startling revelations on how the plots, themes, characters, and conflicts intertwine.

After discovering *The Complete Stephen King Universe*, you will never read Stephen King the same way again.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“This book might be one of the single most important books about Stephen King ever written. . . . Beginning with the premise that all of King's work is intertwined in an intricate weave of overlapping narrative threads, with the world of the Dark Tower as the linchpin around which everything else orbits, Wiater, Golden, and Wagner carefully prove their point, in an entertaining, intriguing, and thoroughly indisputable way.”

—Stephen Spignesi, author of *The Essential Stephen King*

“Here is the Stephen King companion to end all Stephen King companions . . . The three authors bring their considerable expertise to a survey of the complete King fictional corpus, grouping novels and tales by setting and theme. An indispensable insider's guide to the influences on King, his plots and characters, TV and film adaptations, and more.” —*Publishers Weekly*

#### About the Author

**Stanley Wiater** has been interviewing and writing about Stephen King for more than two decades. The award-winning author or editor of ten books, he is the writer and host of the television series *Dark Dreamers*.

**Christopher Golden** is the award-winning author of many bestselling books including *Waking Nightmares*, *Of Saints and Shadows*, *Of Masques and Martyrs*, and *The Myth Hunters*. He has also written books for teens and young adults, including *Soulless* and *Poison Ink*, and he is the editor of *The New Dead: A Zombie Anthology*, published by St. Martin's Press. His novels have been published in fourteen languages. Golden was born and raised in Massachusetts, where he continues to live with his family.

**Hank Wagner** is a respected critic and journalist. Among the many publications in which his work regularly appears are *Cemetery Dance* and *Mystery Scene*.

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### Section One The Worlds of The Dark Tower and The Stand

The Dark Tower series is the core of the Stephen King Universe, and the axis upon which our entire thesis for this book rotates. Though the majority of the author's work takes place in the parallel reality dimension that contains King's fictional towns Castle Rock, Derry, and others, the parallel reality of Roland the Gunslinger--and by extension that of The Stand--is much more fundamental.

Just as, in the series itself, The Dark Tower is the point of time, space, and reality where all dimensions meet, the spindle of creation, so are most of King's works then an outcropping of the Dark Tower series, which was conceived as early as 1970. Nearly all of King's heroes and all of his villains, scattered across the various parallel realities, are involved in a single cosmic conflict, with the Tower as the ultimate prize.

Although Stephen King worked on the Dark Tower series for three decades, consciously and unconsciously

weaving it in and out of his other writings, a great many of his readers are likely to have missed its prominence. Just as the Tower itself binds all realities together, this series of stories and concepts is the center of the Stephen King Universe, the many fictional worlds he has created.

And it all started with a poem.

King read Robert Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1855) for a class assignment in his sophomore year (1967/68) at the University of Maine at Orono. In March of 1970, the year he graduated, he began the first novel in the series, *The Gunslinger*. He continued to work on that novel over the course of the next twelve years, even while he was writing some of his best-loved works, including 'Salem's Lot (1975), *The Shining* (1977), and *The Stand* (1978).

Did he realize, then, at the start of the process, that it would be all of a piece, all bits of a single story? Perhaps. Perhaps not.

But it is. In the fourth volume, *Wizard and Glass* (1997), he at last came to that conclusion. In the afterword, he states:

I have written enough novels and short stories to fill a solar system of the imagination, but Roland's story is my Jupiter--a planet that dwarfs all the others... I am coming to understand that Roland's world (or worlds) actually contains all the others of my making; there is a place in Mid-World for Randall Flagg, Ralph Roberts, the wandering boys from *The Eyes of the Dragon*, even Father Callahan, the damned priest from 'Salem's Lot.

In the latter volumes, the truth of this collision of worlds becomes incarnate, as characters from 'Salem's Lot, *Hearts in Atlantis*, and others all enter into the saga as significant characters, all from different worlds, and as Stephen King himself is drawn into the series as a character, the author a part of his own magnum opus. It is all of a piece.

Herein, we shall discuss the books in this series and those related to it, how they are interrelated and interconnected, and how they touch upon and are likewise touched upon by other of the author's works.

The history of the Dark Tower series is this:

In a place called Mid-World--which might be the future of a world much like our own, or a separate reality entirely--the land is divided into Baronies, some ruled by an honorable rank of men called gunslingers, much like knights. One of the jewels of Mid-world is Gilead, whose lord is Steven Deschain, a gunslinger descended from the bloodline of Arthur Eld, who had united much of Mid-world in ancient times (King Arthur, of course).

But during Steven's time, a new threat arises. John Farson, called "the good man," has begun to incite a rebellion among the peasantry and even some nobility against the Affiliation, the governments of the various Baronies that have banded together. Traitors and spies abound. Marten, a wizard advisor of Steven's, seduces the lord's wife and flaunts that intimacy in front of Steven's son, Roland, a gunslinger-in-training. (In order to become gunslingers, the young students have to best their teacher in battle.) Marten hopes to force Roland to an early test against his teacher so that he will fail, and be killed or banished from Gilead.

Marten's scheme works, but only partially, for Roland does best his instructor in single combat.

Roland is shocked to find that his father is aware of Marten's machinations, and Steven prevents him from going after Marten. He tells his son that Marten is working with Farson (though in fact Marten will eventually be revealed to be Farson), and in order for him to be certain Roland is safe, Steven sends his offspring incognito to a seaside Barony called Mejis, along with his two best friends--Cuthbert and Alain--neither of whom are full gunslingers yet.

In Mejis, however, they find that Farson's plans have stretched even further, and the local authorities are in league with the rebellion. It is evident that Farson, though pretending to be the hero of the people, has had sinister intentions all along. Soon enough, a dark magician called Walter shows up in Mejis; the mage apparently works for both Farson and Marten. Once again, however, it seems this creature has many faces, and is in fact yet another facet of the same man. Walter is Farson and Farson is Marten, all one and the same. There are many other faces to this being, whom we may alternately refer to as "Flagg" or "Legion."

Roland falls in love with Susan Delgado in Mejis, and though their love is doomed (as is Susan), it will be the one real love of his life. During his time by the sea, Roland comes into possession of a glass ball, a powerful magical tool that is part of Maerlyn's Rainbow. In it, he sees a vision of the future, much of which he cannot remember later. One thing remains clear to him: the Dark Tower at the center of all things, the spindle upon which reality turns, has been somehow tainted. It is being corrupted, and Roland decides instantly that he must devote his life to a quest to save the Tower.

Before he may do that, however, he returns to Gilead, where he is tricked by a witch into killing his own mother. The time subsequent to that is shrouded in mystery. All that is known is this: Farson's efforts cause the destruction of the Affiliation and the devastation of Gilead, which only hastens the changes that are coming to the entire world. The world, as Roland says so often, is moving on. It is ending, growing barren and empty. The only way to stop that is to save the Tower, and so Roland and his friends set off on a quest to find it. During that mission, all of his associates, his ka-tet, die, until only he remains.

Many years later, he catches up with Walter, the man in black, and learns a little about the true nature of the Tower. Thereafter, he begins gathering a new ka-tet from various worlds connected to his own: Eddie and Susannah Dean and Jake Chambers become gunslingers in their own right over the course of the quest.

The new ka-tet faces many adventures and hardships during their time together. They cross over from one world to another and then back, through thin places between those worlds. In the New York City that Jake is from there is a rose that is the physical embodiment of the Tower before it became tainted. The agents of chaos, or of the Beast that now guards the Tower, the Crimson King, want it destroyed; Roland and the others will have to save it.

They meet Flagg on their journey, and it is revealed that he is also Marten (Walter/Farson/Legion), who serves the Crimson King. As noted, the specific chronicle of Roland is the centerpiece, but a great many of King's other works have direct or indirect ties to it. Flagg originally appeared in King's landmark novel *The Stand*, still widely considered to be among his best. In that book, a U.S. military research facility investigating biowarfare accidentally unleashes a virus that kills 99.4% of the population of the Earth. In America, the survivors are plagued with dreams of a kindly old woman serving the side of light, and a dark man with blazing red eyes who serves the cause of darkness. This is Flagg. Over the course of the novel, the survivors join one side or the other, and eventually those serving light must make a final stand against those serving darkness. Flagg is defeated, and society and civilization begin again.

At the time of *The Stand*'s publication, Flagg's part in Roland's story was unclear. In fact, the next time Flagg appeared as a major figure was in *The Eyes of the Dragon* (1987). In that fairy-tale-like story, Flagg is

a wizard serving a king in a medieval landscape filled with magick, a land that seems somewhat similar to but not necessarily the same as that of Roland the Gunslinger. (Flagg was noted to have returned to that particular city many times over the ages.) The heroes of that tale eventually defeat Flagg but he escapes, prompting two of them, Thomas and Dennis, to go on a hero's quest to destroy the wizard. That is a story as yet untold.

In the novella "The Little Sisters of Eluria," King clearly connects Roland's world with that of The Eyes of the Dragon, unmistakably making them one and the same. In The Dark Tower IV, Roland and his ka-tet pass through a parallel dimension that is clearly that of The Stand, just before they finally meet Flagg face to face.

A major theme of the Dark Tower series is that due to the machinations of The Crimson King, the "beams" of power that emanate from the Tower and hold all time, space, and reality together are being broken down and corrupted. This phenomenon has affected all of those realities, causing the barriers between them to begin breaking down and allowing for some travel from one to the next.

Consider these few examples:

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