

## "THE WIND THROUGH THE KEYHOLE" (Book Review)

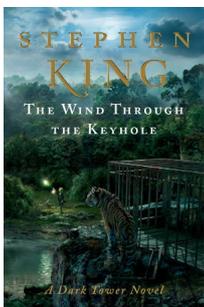
Written by Trevor Parker  
Tuesday, 01 May 2012 14:33

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At seven volumes, one novella and several thousand pages, Stephen King's DARK TOWER series is the definition of epic. Unfolding on the grandest of multi-world scales and incorporating recurring characters from throughout King's almost forty-year writing career, the TOWER books are the finest example of King's vast and formidable imagination soaring at full wingspan. While other writers or filmmakers get congratulations for successfully splicing two or three genres together, with DARK TOWER King juggles nearly *every* genre at once: Western, fantasy, horror, mystery, science fiction, crime drama, meta-fiction, post-apocalypse, teen romance, time travel, even comedy.

And bias revealed: this reviewer will now take a deep breath and declare the TOWER cycle to be King's ultimate masterpiece, a colossus that climbs high above even irreproachable fan-favorites like THE STAND or DIFFERENT SEASONS (feel free to argue and froth in the comment section below). So, there was at least one reader who met THE WIND THROUGH THE KEYHOLE (Scribner) with a bit of trepidation—would this revisit to the DARK TOWER universe, set between volumes four and five, tamper with a tale that has already reached its resolution?



THE WIND IN THE KEYHOLE fills in the period of time that Gunslinger Roland and apprentices Susannah, Eddie, Jake (and Oy, of course) spent travelling the sullen and dangerous passages between the Emerald City and the cursed farming community of Calla Bryn Sturgis. A rare flash-freeze drives the group off the road, and their evening is spent listening to Roland spin memories from his distant past. Hear how a young, melancholy Roland was sent to a faltering mining village on the outer edges of Gilead to hunt down a 'skin-man', a bloodthirsty

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shape-shifter who can mimic an array of deadly animals. Can Roland and taciturn fellow Gunslinger Jamie DeCurry uncover the Skin-man's human identity before any more innocent townsfolk are lost? And will the recounting of Roland's favorite childhood bedtime story to a young witness help them find their quarry?

It's a pleasure look around and find oneself back in Mid-world, King's faraway fictional land that is at once frighteningly alien and filled with homey, familiar imagery and icons. The depth and detail of folklore manufactured for Roland's realm, with its skewed pastiches of Arthurian knights-errant, steeped in the lonesome mythology of the American west, is as intricate and absorbing as ever. And Fangorians rejoice: KEYHOLE holds the reddest pages to spurt out of King's keyboard in quite some time, as the slippery skin-man disassembles its victims in spectacularly gory fashion (special mention goes to the scene after the occupants of a ranch house have been slaughtered; the skin-man mercifully spares a pair of household dogs, only for them to later make a cheerful buffet of their late master's exposed brains and spilled innards. Nasty.) Thematically, we get a number of King's standards; a cancerous secret in a small community, a heroically brave pre-teen in jeopardy, and the clairvoyant trickster sometimes known as Flagg up to his usual. KEYHOLE is another tale well-told, but whose fault is to be little more than an episode; an interesting but inessential detour to the saga as a whole. The compact yarns here are plenty entertaining, but they don't hold quite as much weight when put against the very high stakes that Roland and company battled under during the TOWER series proper.

Regardless of KEYHOLE's somewhat disposable nature, King's legion of fans will no doubt cheer the addition of another spoke to Roland's circular journey, as well the chance to sit again by the fire with some old friends during the short "framing" chapters of the book. The comforting banter and camaraderie of Roland's strange travelling tribe has always been the true heart of the DARK TOWER books, and it's a pleasure to be able to enjoy that company, even for the briefest of spells, one more time.

