# STEPHEN KING

# The Wind Through the Keyhole

*A Dark Tower Novel*

Early praise for

# *The Wind Through the Keyhole*

"Pitch perfect...[it] works beautifully...Even those who are not familiar with the series will find the conclusion both moving and satisfying." – **PUBLISHERS WEEKLY**, Starred Review

"I have always found Roland's formative years the most compelling, and this takes us back to the year following his mother's death…The story reads like a genre mash-up of horror/western/detective fiction, in which our hero rides into town to wade through gore, solve a mystery, and bring justice to an unruly frontier town. The experience will further steel him for the man he will become, the stone-faced gunslinger who makes bullets dance from six-shooters with sandalwood grips…I felt enchanted…[King] still tells stories better than anyone." – **BENJAMIN PERCY, ESQUIRE**

"This is King at his most beguiling and most literarily distinguished." – **BOOKLIST**, Starred Review

# The Wind Through the Keyhole

A Dark Tower Novel

## Stephen King

In *The Wind Through the Keyhole*, Stephen King returns to the rich landscape of Mid-World, the spectacular territory of the Dark Tower fantasy saga that stands as his most beguiling achievement.

Roland Deschain and his ka-tet—Jake, Susannah, Eddie, and Oy, the billy-bumbler—encounter a ferocious storm just after crossing the River Whye on their way to the Outer Baronies. As they shelter from the howling gale, Roland tells his friends not just one strange story but two . . . and in so doing, casts new light on his own troubled past.

In his early days as a gunslinger, in the guilt-ridden year following his mother's death, Roland is sent by his father to investigate evidence of a murderous shape-shifter, a "skin-man" preying upon the population around Debaria. Roland takes charge of Bill Streeter, the brave but terrified boy who is the sole surviving witness to the beast's most recent slaughter. Only a teenager himself, Roland calms the boy and prepares him for the following day's trials by reciting a story from the Magic Tales of the Eld that his mother often read to him at bedtime. "A person's never too old for stories," Roland says to Bill. "Man and boy, girl and woman, never too old. We live for them." And indeed, the tale that Roland unfolds, the legend of Tim Stoutheart, is a timeless treasure for all ages, a story that lives for us.

King began the Dark Tower series in 1974; it gained momentum in the 1980s; and he brought it to a thrilling conclusion when the last three novels were published in 2003 and 2004. *The Wind Through the Keyhole* is sure to fascinate avid fans of the Dark Tower epic. But this novel also stands on its own for all readers, an enchanting and haunting journey to Roland's world and testimony to the power of Stephen King's storytelling magic.

## OTHER *DARK TOWER*–RELATED WORKS BY STEPHEN KING

### NOVELS

*'Salem's Lot*

*The Stand*

*The Dark Tower I: The Gunslinger*

*The Talisman* (with Peter Straub)

*It*

*The Eyes of the Dragon*

*The Dark Tower II: The Drawing of the Three*

*The Dark Tower III: The Waste Lands*

*Insomnia*

*Rose Madder*

*Desperation*

*The Regulators* (as Richard Bachman)

*The Dark Tower IV: Wizard and Glass*

*Bag of Bones*

*Black House* (with Peter Straub)

*From a Buick 8*

*The Dark Tower V: Wolves of the Calla*

*The Dark Tower VI: Song of Susannah*

*The Dark Tower VII: The Dark Tower*

### COLLECTIONS

*Skeleton Crew*

*Hearts in Atlantis*

*Everything's Eventual*

*This is for Robin Furth,*
*and the gang at Marvel Comics.*

# FOREWORD

Many of the people holding this book have followed the adventures of Roland and his band—his ka-tet—for years, some of them from the very beginning. Others—and I hope there are many, newcomers and Constant Readers alike—may ask, *Can I read and enjoy this story if I haven't read the other Dark Tower books?* My answer is yes, if you keep a few things in mind.

First, Mid-World lies next to our world, and there are many overlaps. In some places there are doorways between the two worlds, and sometimes there are thin places, porous places, where the two worlds actually mingle. Three of Roland's ka-tet—Eddie, Susannah, and Jake—have been drawn separately from troubled lives in New York into Roland's Mid-World quest. Their fourth traveling companion, a billy-bumbler named Oy, is a golden-eyed creature native to Mid-World. Mid-World is very old, and falling to ruin, filled with monsters and untrustworthy magic.

Second, Roland Deschain of Gilead is a gunslinger—one of a small band that tries to keep order in an increasingly lawless world. If you think of the gunslingers of Gilead as a strange combination of knights errant and territorial marshals in the Old West, you'll be close to the mark. Most of them, although not all, are descended from the line of the old White King, known as Arthur Eld (I told you there were overlaps).

Third, Roland has lived his life under a terrible curse. He killed his mother, who was having an affair—mostly against her will, and certainly against her better judgment—with a fellow you will meet in these pages. Although it was by mistake, he holds himself accountable, and the unhappy Gabrielle Deschain's death has haunted him since his young manhood. These events are fully narrated in the Dark Tower cycle, but for our purposes here, I think it's all you have to know.

For longtime readers, this book should be shelved between *Wizard and Glass* and *Wolves of the Calla* . . . which makes it, I suppose, *Dark Tower 4.5.*

As for me, I was delighted to discover my old friends had a little more to say. It was a great gift to find them again, years after I thought their stories were told.

—Stephen King
September 14, 2011

# Starkblast

# 1

During the days after they left the Green Palace that wasn't Oz after all—but which was now the tomb of the unpleasant fellow Roland's ka-tet had known as the Tick-Tock Man—the boy Jake began to range farther and farther ahead of Roland, Eddie, and Susannah.

"Don't you worry about him?" Susannah asked Roland. "Out there on his own?"

"He's got Oy with him," Eddie said, referring to the billy-bumbler who had adopted Jake as his special friend. "Mr. Oy gets along with nice folks all right, but he's got a mouthful of sharp teeth for those who aren't so nice. As that guy Gasher found out to his sorrow."

"Jake also has his father's gun," Roland said. "And he knows how to use it. That he knows very well. And he won't leave the Path of the Beam." He pointed overhead with his reduced hand. The low-hanging sky was mostly still, but a single corridor of clouds moved steadily southeast. Toward the land of Thunderclap, if the note left behind for them by the man who styled himself RF had told the truth.

Toward the Dark Tower.

"But why—" Susannah began, and then her wheelchair hit a bump. She turned to Eddie. "Watch where you're pushin me, sugar."

"Sorry," Eddie said. "Public Works hasn't been doing any maintenance along this stretch of the turnpike lately. Must be dealing with budget cuts."

It wasn't a turnpike, but it *was* a road . . . or had been: two ghostly ruts with an occasional tumbledown shack to mark the way. Earlier that morning they had even passed an abandoned store with a barely readable sign: TOOK'S OUTLAND MERCANTILE. They investigated inside for supplies—Jake and Oy had still been with them then—and had found nothing but dust, ancient cobwebs, and the skeleton of what had been either a large raccoon, a small dog, or a billy-bumbler. Oy had taken a cursory sniff and then pissed on the bones before leaving the store to sit on the hump in the middle of the old road with his squiggle of a tail curled around him. He faced back the way they had come, sniffing the air.

Roland had seen the bumbler do this several times lately, and although he had said nothing, he pondered it. Someone trailing them, maybe? He didn't actually believe this, but the bumbler's posture—nose lifted, ears pricked, tail curled—called up some old memory or association that he couldn't quite catch.

"Why does Jake want to be on his own?" Susannah asked.

"Do you find it worrisome, Susannah of New York?" Roland asked.

"Yes, Roland of Gilead, I find it *worrisome.*" She smiled amiably enough, but in her eyes, the old mean light sparkled. That was the Detta Walker part of her, Roland reckoned. It would never be completely gone, and he wasn't sorry. Without the strange woman she had once been still buried in her heart like a chip of ice, she would have been only a handsome black woman with no legs below the knees. With Detta onboard, she was a person to be reckoned with. A dangerous one. A gunslinger.

"He has plenty of stuff to think about," Eddie said quietly. "He's been through a lot. Not every kid comes back from the dead. And it's like Roland says—if someone tries to face him down, it's the someone who's apt to be sorry." Eddie stopped pushing the wheelchair, armed sweat from his brow, and looked at Roland. "*Are* there someones in this particular suburb of nowhere, Roland? Or have they all moved on?"

"Oh, there are a few, I wot."

He did more than wot; they had been peeked at several times as they continued their course along the Path of the Beam. Once by a frightened woman with her arms around two children and a babe hanging in a sling from her neck. Once by an old farmer, a half-mutie with a jerking tentacle that hung from one corner of his mouth. Eddie and Susannah had seen none of these people, or sensed the others that Roland felt sure had, from the safety of the woods and high grasses, marked their progress. Eddie and Susannah had a lot to learn.

But they had learned at least some of what they would need, it seemed, because Eddie now asked, "Are they the ones Oy keeps scenting up behind us?"

"I don't know." Roland thought of adding that he was sure something else was on Oy's strange little bumbler mind, and decided not to. The gunslinger had spent long years with no ka-tet, and keeping his own counsel had become a habit. One he would have to break, if the tet was to remain strong. But not now, not this morning.

"Let's move on," he said. "I'm sure we'll find Jake waiting for us up ahead."

## 2

Two hours later, just shy of noon, they breasted a rise and halted, looking down at a wide, slow-moving river, gray as pewter beneath the overcast sky. On the northwestern bank—their side—was a barnlike building painted a green so bright it seemed to yell into the muted day. Its mouth jutted out over the water on pilings painted a similar green. Docked to two of these pilings by thick hawsers was a large raft, easily ninety feet by ninety, painted in alternating stripes of red and yellow. A tall wooden pole that looked like a mast jutted from the center, but there was no sign of a sail. Several wicker chairs sat in front of the pole, facing the shore on their side of the river. Jake was seated in one of these. Next to him was an old man in a vast straw hat, baggy green pants, and longboots. On his top half he wore a thin white garment—the kind of shirt Roland thought of as a slinkum. Jake and the old man appeared to be eating well-stuffed popkins. Roland's mouth sprang water at the sight of them.

Oy was beyond them, at the edge of the circus-painted raft, looking raptly down at his own reflection. Or perhaps at the reflection of the steel cable that ran overhead, spanning the river.

"Is it the Whye?" Susannah asked Roland.

"Yar."

Eddie grinned. "You say Whye; I say Whye Not?" He raised one hand and waved it over his head. "Jake! Hey, Jake! Oy!"

Jake waved back, and although the river and the raft moored at its edge were still a quarter of a mile away, their eyes were uniformly sharp, and they saw the white of the boy's teeth as he grinned.

Susannah cupped her hands around her mouth. "Oy! *Oy!* To me, sugar! Come see your mama!"

Uttering shrill yips that were the closest he could get to barks,

Oy flew across the raft, disappeared into the barnlike structure, then emerged on their side. He came charging up the path with his ears lowered against his skull and his gold-ringed eyes bright.

"Slow down, sug, you'll give yourself a heart attack!" Susannah shouted, laughing.

Oy seemed to take this as an order to speed up. He arrived at Susannah's wheelchair in less than two minutes, jumped up into her lap, then jumped down again and looked at them cheerfully. "Olan! Ed! Suze!"

"Hile, Sir Throcken," Roland said, using the ancient word for bumbler he'd first heard in a book read to him by his mother: *The Throcken and the Dragon.*

Oy lifted his leg, watered a patch of grass, then faced back the way they had come, scenting at the air, eyes on the horizon.

"Why does he keep doing that, Roland?" Eddie asked.

"I don't know." But he *almost* knew. Was it some old story, not *The Throcken and the Dragon* but one like it? Roland thought so. For a moment he thought of green eyes, watchful in the dark, and a little shiver went through him—not of fear, exactly (although that might have been a part of it), but of remembrance. Then it was gone.

*There'll be water if God wills it,* he thought, and only realized he had spoken aloud when Eddie said, "Huh?"

"Never mind," Roland said. "Let's have a little palaver with Jake's new friend, shall we? Perhaps he has an extra popkin or two."

Eddie, tired of the chewy staple they called gunslinger burritos, brightened immediately. "Hell, yeah," he said, and looked at an imaginary watch on his tanned wrist. "Goodness me, I see it's just gobble o'clock."

"Shut up and push, honeybee," Susannah said.

Eddie shut up and pushed.

SCRIBNER
A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2012 by Stephen King

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. For information, address Scribner Subsidiary Rights Department, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020.

First Scribner hardcover edition April 2012

SCRIBNER and design are registered trademarks of The Gale Group, Inc., used under license by Simon & Schuster, Inc., the publisher of this work.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Simon & Schuster Special Sales at 1-866-506-1949 or business@simonandschuster.com.

The Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau can bring authors to your live event. For more information or to book an event contact the Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau at 1-866-248-3049 or visit our website at www.simonspeakers.com.

DESIGNED BY ERICH HOBBING

Manufactured in the United States of America

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

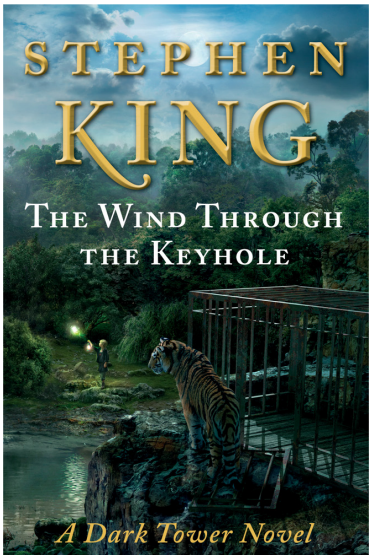
Library of Congress Control Number: 2011050590

ISBN 978-1-4516-5890-3
ISBN 978-1-4516-5892-7 (ebook)

# The Wind Through the Keyhole

A Dark Tower Novel

## Stephen King




**Buy the hardcover**

BARNES & NOBLE.com

INDIEBOUND

amazon.com

**Buy the eBook**

**Buy the unabridged audio download**

(read by Stephen King)

**Buy the unabridged compact disc**

(read by Stephen King)