

INTERVIEW #2

Stephen King

INTERVIEW #2

Stephen King

Stephen King sat down with himself on the evening of June 3, 2002, to discuss his progress on the last three Dark Tower novels, and to talk a little bit about what readers can expect. And when.

The interview ended with the Red Sox game still in progress, but it can be noted here that they went on to lose. But then, so did the Yankees.

Steve: Thanks very much for making this time to talk about The Dark Tower for visitors to your website.

S.K. Well, it's your website, too, you know.

Steve: That's true.

S.K. And this'll have to be a real shortie, because the Red Sox are playing tonight. I checked, though, and Pedro just gave up a home run to the Tigers' lead-off hitter, so maybe that's not a priority.

Steve: We'll keep it brief, just the same. As a matter of personal curiosity, do you find interviewing yourself difficult?

S.K. No. All writers talk to themselves, I think. This is just another version of that.

Steve: What are you listening to these days?

S.K. Well, the new Eminem record kicks major ass. The guy is funny, smart, and sometimes shocking. Those are all things I look for in rock and roll.

Steve: Eminem's a rapper.

S.K. It's all rock and roll to me, although Eminem might not go along with that. In fact, he'd probably get his buddy Slim Shady to call me on the phone and tell me to go fuck myself.

Steve: Seen anything good at the movies?

S.K. Unfaithful. Good suspense and beautifully photographed. Everyone's talking about Diane Lane, but I was startled by what a wonderfully understated performance Richard Gere turned in.

Steve: Seen Clones?

S.K. (laughs) You sound like that ad: "Got milk?" No. Next week, I think. I've been waiting for the crowds to thin. I'll probably enjoy it. People have gotten into the habit of expecting far too much from those movies, you know-from the first one on, they've been loving recreations of the movie serials that George Lucas must have been hooked on as a kid-the Flash Gordon/Buck Rogers stuff. Nothing expresses that so clearly as titles like "A New Hope" and "The Attack of the Clones," or whatever it is. And then the critics act pissed because they're getting popcorn movies instead of Truffaut.

Steve: So let's get down to business.

S.K. Let's. You've only got ten minutes left.

Steve: Then why'd you waste my time, gassing about George Lucas and Eminem?

S.K. It was my time, too. If you see what I mean.

Steve (sighs): All right, where are you vis a vis The Dark Tower?

S.K. Well, Book 5, Wolves of the Calla, and Book 6, Song of Susannah, are both done-down on paper, anyway. I'd say the last book, which is simply called The Dark Tower, is about a third of the way. That's a total of 1900 manuscript pages since last July. It's easily the biggest project I've ever taken on, and I'm throwing in everything I have. Including a little craft, actually. But I'm tired, so-
Steve: Time off, right?

S.K. Yeah. Need to shut everything down for a little while and recharge.

Steve: How long?

S.K. If the computer screens stay dark and I can keep from picking up a legal pad, a month should do it. I'll be crazy by July 4th, but I should be rested and ready to rock.

Steve: Happy with everything so far?

S.K. I don't know how I feel. Weird, I guess. You have to remember that this project spans over thirty years of my life, and a lot of other books I've written have this as their basis. I feel a little like Cal Ripken, making his farewell tour of all the stadiums in the American League. But in the quiet room where I work, no one's cheering. I just hope some of them will when they read the pages. You have to remember that, for most Steve King readers, Roland the gunslinger's never been a priority. The Dark Tower books are...well, they're different.

Steve: Father Callahan from 'Salem's Lot turns up in these books, doesn't he?

S.K. Yeah. Also Ted Brautigan from Hearts in Atlantis, Sheemie the tavern-boy from Wizard and Glass...even Dinky Earnshawe from the short story "Everything's Eventual."

Steve: Who's doing the art for the Donald Grant editions?

S.K. Some good people. Great people, actually. Berni Wrightson's gonna do the illustrations for Wolves. I've already seen some roughs, and they are so fucking terrific. Darrel Anderson is going to do Song of Susannah, and I'm hoping that Michael Whelan will sign up to do the paintings for the final volume, The Dark Tower.

Steve: Wow, he did the first one, right?

S.K. Yeah, and it's his version of Roland I always see in my mind's eye when I write. I really hope this happens. He'd be the only one to do pictures for two of the books, but since he was there at the

beginning, it'd be great if he was there at the end. Alpha and omega, baby.

Steve: Big question. When will they be published?

S.K. That's an impossible question to answer while the books are still not finished. Let me put it this way. If everything went perfectly-the way they do in your daydreams, where you pitch no-hitters and win Academy Awards-Wolves would be published by Donald Grant Publishers sometime late in 2003. Song and Tower would follow in short order.

Steve: You mean they'd come out like three months apart?

S.K. Roughly, yeah.

Steve: If we're talking about long books, those will be expensive items-Grant does beautiful work, and then there's the illustrations.

S.K. They'll be expensive, all right. The Grant editions have always been pricey, right from Book One, The Gunslinger.

Steve: Will the fans think you're ripping them off?

S.K. I don't know. I hope not, because I ain't. You know that saying about how you can't please all the people all of the time? Back in the old Dark Tower days [1982, 1987, 1992] I used to get letters from fans howling that they couldn't get the books at any price, because they were limited editions. The assumption that anyone with the money should be entitled to anything makes me crazy, but let's not go there tonight. In this case, there'll be books for anyone who wants them, so at least there shouldn't be complaints on that score. Unless something goes wrong, which I suppose is always a possibility. But for me, it's a personal decision. Grant wanted Roland of Gilead when nobody else, including my own mainstream publisher, wanted anything from me but horror stories. I started with Grant, and although Don himself is now retired-living the good life in Florida, I believe, with his lovely wife-I intend to finish with Grant. Robert

Wiener's now at the helm, and he's a damned good guy. I'd salute and call him captain any day, tell you that.

Steve: What about the paperbacks? They should be more affordable.

S.K. Yeah. I really don't want to skin anybody for these books. If things go as I hope they will, the trade paperbacks will follow hot on the heels of the hardcovers. Much more affordable.

Steve: A six-month lag-time, would you say?

S.K. Sounds about right, but that's not worked out yet. The trade paperback editions will come from Scribner's, they'll have all the illustrations and grace-notes, and they'll sell for a lot less scratch.

Steve: How much is a lot less scratch?

S.K. All I could do is guess.

Steve: Guess.

S.K. Why are you being such a bastard to me tonight?

Steve: I am you. Guess.

S.K. Shit, I don't know. Say twenty bucks each, but don't hold me to it.

Steve: And then the mass market paperbacks from Pocket Books?

S.K. I'd presume.

Steve: A year later.

S.K. That's usually the deal, yeah.

Steve: And for people who want to catch up, what about the first four volumes? Are they still available in New American Library editions?

S.K. Yeah. Signet's putting new covers on the mass market paperbacks.

Steve: Will Plume re-issue their trade paperbacks, do you think? There were some great illustrations in those.

S.K. Hope so, but I really couldn't tell you. I haven't had a lot of contact with those folks since the Penguin Putnam Era began over at Viking and NAL.

Steve: And now Phyllis Grann has moved on.

S.K. Yep. So she has.

Steve: Any comments on that?

S.K. Nope. Are we about through here?

Steve: Two more questions, maybe. The first one: There were these nifty little synopsis things at the beginning of Books 2, 3, and 4. Will we see those in the last three?

S.K. No. The Dark Tower is really a single novel. Those who've followed the story up to this point can pick up right where they left off, with no problem. For those who've never read The Dark Tower series at all...well, Wolves of the Calla is not the place to start. Those people would do better to go back to the beginning. A synopsis would be as long as a novella, and confusing at that. What's your last question? The Red Sox have tied it, 4-4 in the fourth.

Steve: Will these books really get finished?

S.K. Until you write THE END at the bottom of the last page, you can never be sure; a storm can always come up and sink your little boat. I know about storms, because I've had a few in my life. All I can say is that I'm trying as hard as I can, and so far the work seems good to

me. On a day by day basis, I'm having a great time, and that's usually a good sign.

Steve: Will Roland and his friends make it to the Dark Tower? And if they do, what will they find there?

S.K. It's time for me to go and watch some baseball.