

And Just as Far as Ever from the End: A Textual Analysis of The Gunslinger by Stephen King

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Abstract:

Beginning as a collection of short stories published in The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction in 1978 and novelized in 1982, The Gunslinger is the first novel in Stephen King's Dark Tower series. This thesis explores the textual journey of the novel that serves as the foundation for a series that has left its mark throughout King's broader fictional canon. After finishing the final three novels of the series, King revised The Gunslinger to bring it closer to the narrative essence of the series' subsequent novels. Collation of all three versions of the text—the serialized Fantasy & Science Fiction stories, the 1982 novelization and the 2003 revised and expanded version—reveals a sometimes overlapping pattern of revisions to the novel. These revisions concentrate on character, the novel's cosmological framework, and languages and dialects King uses later in the series. The impact of these revisions extends beyond the plot elements of the series itself, as a number of King's most popular novels—The Stand, 'Salem's Lot, and It among them—have plot arcs that bend toward the Dark Tower mythos. King returned to the novel's three main characters—Roland, Jake, and the man in black—to refine their actions and clarify their motivations. This also gave him the opportunity to provide the reader with more of their interwoven histories, a strategy that established the background for the role each character plays later in the series. In addition to introducing details about the main characters of the series, King enhances and redefines the world of The Gunslinger; the revisions reveal connections both within and outside of the Dark Tower multiverse. King also uses revision to introduce a variety of languages and dialects Roland encounters on his journey through an endless path of worlds. Finally, the textual evolution of The Gunslinger documents King's development of a theme central to his entire canon: the multifaceted theme of salvation and sacrifice. In controlling the evolution of the Dark Tower series, particularly with his return to revise The Gunslinger, Stephen King shows that he is capable of maintaining a complex saga with a great degree of literary vision and craftsmanship.

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The *Gunslinger* is a fantasy novel by American author Stephen King, the first volume in the *Dark Tower* series. The *Gunslinger* was first published in 1982 as a fix-up novel, joining five short stories that had been published between 1978 and 1981. King substantially revised the novel in 2003, and this version is in print today. The story centers upon Roland Deschain, the last gunslinger, who has been chasing after his adversary, "the man in black," for many years. The novel fuses Western fiction with