

STEPHEN KING



THE
DARK TOWER
THE GUNSLINGER

WITH COLOR ILLUSTRATIONS
BY MICHAEL WHELAN



THE GUNSLINGER

Stephen King

I

The man in black led him to an ancient killing ground to make palaver. The gunslinger knew it immediately; a Golgotha, place-of-the-skull. And bleached skulls stared blandly up at them - cattle, coyotes, deer, rabbits. Here the alabaster xylophone of a hen pheasant killed as she fed; there the tiny, delicate bones of a mole, perhaps killed for pleasure by a wild dog.

The Golgotha was a bowl indented into the descending slope of the mountain, and below, in easier altitudes, the gunslinger could see Joshua trees and scrub firs. The sky overhead was a softer blue than he had seen for a twelve-month, and there was an indefinable something that spoke of the sea in the not-too-great distance.

Jam in the West, Cuthbert, he thought wonderingly.

And of course in each skull, in each rondure of vacated eye, he saw the boy's face.

The man in black sat on an ancient ironwood log. His boots were powdered white with dust and the uneasy bone-meal of this place. He had put his hood up again, but the gunslinger could see the square shape of his chin clearly, and the shading of his jaw.

The shadowed lips twitched in a smile. "Gather wood, gunslinger. This side of the mountains is gentle, but at this altitude, the cold still may put a knife in one's belly. And this is a place of death, eh?"

"I'll kill you," the gunslinger said.

"No you won't You can't. But you can gather wood to remember your Isaac."

The gunslinger had no understanding of the reference. He went wordlessly and gathered wood like a common cook's boy. The

pickings were slim. There was no devil-grass on this side and the ironwood would not burn. It had become stone.

He returned finally with a large armload, powdered and dusted with disintegrated bone, as if dipped in flour. The sun had sunk beyond the highest Joshua trees and had taken on a reddish glow and peered at them with baleful indifference through the black, tortured branches.

“Excellent,” the man in black said. “How exceptional you are! How methodical! I salute you!” He giggled, and the gunslinger dropped the wood at his feet with a crash that ballooned up bone dust.

The man in black did not start or jump; he merely began laying the fire. The gunslinger watched, fascinated, as the idiogram (fresh, this time) took shape.

When it was finished, it resembled a small and complex double chimney about two feet high. The man in black lifted his hand skyward, shaking back the voluminous sleeve from a tapered, handsome hand, and brought it down rapidly, index and pinky fingers forked out in the traditional sign of the evil eye. There was a blue flash of flame, and their fire was lighted.

“I have matches,” the man in black said jovially, “but I thought you might enjoy the magic. For a pretty, gunslinger. Now cook our dinner.”

The folds of his robe shivered, and the plucked and gutted carcass of a plump rabbit fell on the dirt.

The gunslinger spitted the rabbit wordlessly and roasted it. A savory smell drifted up as the sun went down.

Purple shadows drifted hungrily over the bowl where the man in black had chosen to finally face him. The gunslinger felt hunger begin to rumble endlessly in his belly as the rabbit browned; but when the meat was cooked and its juices sealed in, he handed the

entire skewer wordlessly to the man in black, rummaged in his own nearly flat knapsack, and withdrew the last of his jerky. It was salty, painful to his mouth, and tasted like tears.

“That’s a worthless gesture,” the man in black said, managing to sound angry and amused at the same time.

“Nevertheless,” the gunslinger said. There were tiny sores in his mouth, the result of vitamin deprivation, and the salt taste made him grin bitterly.

“Are you afraid of enchanted meat?”

“Yes.”

The man in black slipped his hood back.

The gunslinger looked at him silently. In a way, the face of the man in black was an uneasy disappointment. It was handsome and regular, with none of the marks and twists which indicate a person who has been through awesome times and who has been privy to great and unknown secrets. His hair was black and of a ragged, matted length. His forehead was high, his eyes dark and brilliant. His nose was nondescript. The lips were full and sensual. His complexion was pallid, as was the gunslinger’s own.

He said finally, “I expected an older man.”

“Not necessary. I am nearly immortal. I could have taken a face that you more expected, of course, but I elected to show you the one I was — ah — born with.

See, gunslinger, the sunset.”

The sun had departed already, and the western sky was filled with a sullen furnace light.

“You won’t see another sunrise for what may seem a very long time,” the man in black said softly.

The gunslinger remembered the pit under the mountains and then looked at the sky, where the constellations sprawled in clockspring profusion.

“It doesn’t matter,” he said softly, “now.”

The man in black shuffled the cards with flying, merging rapidity. The deck was huge, the design on the backs of the cards convoluted. “These are tarot cards,”

the man in black was saying, “a mixture of the standard deck and a selection of my own development Watch closely gunslinger.”

“Why?”

“I’m going to tell your future, Roland. Seven cards must be turned, one at a time, and placed in conjunction with the others. I’ve not done this for over three hundred years. And I suspect I’ve never read one quite like yours.” The mocking note was creeping in again, like a Kuvian night-soldier with a killing knife gripped in one hand. “You are the world’s last adventurer. The last crusader. How that must please you, Roland! Yet you have no idea how close you stand to the Tower now, how close in time. Worlds turn about your head.”

“Read my fortune then,” he said harshly.

The first card was turned.

“The Hanged Man,” the man in black said. The darkness had given him back his hood. “Yet here, in conjunction with nothing else, it signifies strength and not death. You, gunslinger, are the Hanged Man, plodding ever onward toward your goal over all the pits of Hades. You have already dropped one co-traveler into the pit, have you not?”

He turned the second card. “The Sailor. Note the clear brow, the hairless cheeks, the wounded eyes. He drowns, gunslinger, and no one throws out the line.

The boy Jake.”

The gunslinger winced, said nothing.

The third card was turned. A baboon stood grinningly astride a young man’s shoulder. The young man’s face was turned up, a grimace of stylized dread and horror on his features. Looking more closely, the gunslinger saw the baboon held a whip.

“The Prisoner,” the man in black said. The fire cast uneasy, flickering shadows over the face of the ridden man, making it seem to move and writhe in wordless terror. The gunslinger flicked his eyes away.

“A trifle upsetting, isn’t he?” The man in black said, and seemed on the verge of sniggering.

He turned the fourth card. A woman with a shawl over her head sat spinning at a wheel. To the gunslinger’s dazed eyes, she appeared to be smiling craftily and sobbing at the same time.

“The Lady of Shadows,” the man in black remarked. “Does she look two-faced to you, gunslinger? She is. A veritable Janus.”

“Why are you showing me these?”

“Don’t ask!” The man in black said sharply, yet he smiled. “Don’t ask. Merely watch. Consider this only pointless ritual if it eases you and cools you to do so. Like church.”

He tittered and turned the fifth card.

A grinning reaper clutched a scythe with bony fingers.

“Death,” the man in black said simply. “Yet not for you.”

The sixth card.

The gunslinger looked at it and felt a strange, crawling anticipation in his guts. The feeling was mixed with horror and joy, and the whole of

the emotion was unnamable. It made him feel like throwing up and dancing at the same time.

“The Tower,” the man in black said softly.

The gunslinger’s card occupied the center of the pattern; each of the following four stood at one corner, like satellites circling a star.

“Where does that one go?” The gunslinger asked.

The man in black placed the Tower over the Hanged Man, covering it completely.

“What does that mean?” The gunslinger asked. The man in black did not answer.

“What does that mean?” He asked raggedly. The man in black did not answer.

“God damn you!” No answer.

“Then what’s the seventh card?”

The man in black turned the seventh. A sun rose in a luminously blue sky. Cupids and sprites sported around it

“The seventh is Life,” the man in black said softly. “But not for you. “

“Where does it fit the pattern?”

“That is not for you to know,” the man in black said. “Or for me to know.” He flipped the card carelessly into the dying fire. It charred, curled and flashed to flame. The gunslinger felt his heart quail and turn icy in his chest.

“Sleep now,” the man in black said carelessly. “Perchance to dream and that sort of thing.”

“I’m going to choke you dead,” the gunslinger said. His legs coiled with savage, splendid suddenness, and he flew across the fire at the other. The man in black, smiling, swelled in his vision and then retreated down a long and echoing corridor filled with obsidian pylons. The world filled with the sound of sardonic laughter, he was falling, dying, sleeping.

He dreamed.

The universe was void. Nothing moved. Nothing was.

The gunslinger drifted, bemused.

“Let us have light,” the voice of the man in black said nonchalantly, and there was light. The gunslinger thought in a detached way that the light was good.

“Now darkness overhead with stars in it. Water down below.” It happened. He drifted over endless seas. Above, the stars twinkled endlessly.

“Land,” the man in black invited. There was; it heaved itself out of the water in endless, galvanic convulsions. It was red, arid, cracked and glazed with sterility. Volcanoes blurted endless magma like giant pimples on some ugly adolescent’s baseball head.

“Okay,” the man in black was saying. “That’s a start. Let’s have some plants.

Trees. Grass and fields.”

There was. Dinosaurs rambled here and there, growling and woofing and eating each other and getting stuck in bubbling, odiferous tarpits. Huge tropical rain-forests sprawled everywhere. Giant ferns waved at the sky with serrated leaves, beetles with two heads crawled on some of them. All this the gunslinger saw. And yet he felt big.

“Now man,” the man in black said softly, but the gunslinger was falling..., falling up. The horizon of this vast and fecund earth began to curve. Yes, they had all said it had curved, his teachers, they had claimed it had been proved long before the world had moved on. But this —Further and further. Continents took shape before his amazed eyes, and were obscured with clocksprings of clouds. The world’s atmosphere held it in a placental sac. And the sun, rising beyond the earth’s shoulder —He cried out and threw an arm before his eyes.

“Let there be light!” The voice that cried was no longer that of the man in black. It was gigantic, echoing. It filled space, and the spaces between spaces.

“Light!”

Falling, falling.

The sun shrank. A red planet crossed with canals whirled past him, two moons circling it furiously. A whirling belt of stones. A gigantic planet that seethed with gasses, too huge to support itself, oblate in consequence. A ringed world that glittered with its engirdlement of icy spicules.

“Light! Let there be —Other worlds, one, two three. Far beyond the last, one lonely ball of ice and rock twirling in dead darkness about a sun that glittered no brighter than a tarnished penny.

Darkness.

“No,” the gunslinger said, and his words were flat and echoless in the darkness.

It was darker than dark. Beside it the darkest night of a man’s soul was noonday. The darkness under the mountains was a mere smudge on the face of Light. “No more, please, no more now. No more —“LIGHT!”

“No more. No more, please —The stars themselves began to shrink. Whole nebulae drew together and became mindless smudges. The whole universe seemed to be drawing around him.

“Jesus no more no more no more —The voice of the man in black whispered silkily in his ear: “Then renege. Cast away all thoughts of the Tower. Go your way, gunslinger, and save your soul.”

He gathered himself. Shaken and alone, enwrapt in the darkness, terrified of an ultimate meaning rushing at him, he gathered himself and uttered the final, flashing imperative:

“NO! NEVER!”

“THEN LET THERE BE LIGHT!”

And there was light, crashing in on him like a hammer, a great and primordial light. In it, consciousness perished — but before it did, the gunslinger saw something of cosmic importance. He clutched it with agonized effort and sought himself.

He fled the insanity the knowledge implied, and so came back to himself.

It was still night — whether the same or another, he had no way of knowing. He pushed himself up from where his demon spring at the man in black had carried him and looked at the ironwood where the man in black had been sitting. He was gone.

A great sense of despair flooded him — God, all that to do over again — and then the man in black said from behind him: “Over here, gunslinger. I don’t like you so close. You talk in your sleep.” He tittered.

The gunslinger got groggily to his knees and turned around. The fire had burned down to red embers and gray ashes, leaving the familiar decayed pattern of exhausted fuel. The man in black was seated next to it, smacking his lips over the greasy remains of the rabbit.

“You did fairly well,” the man in black said. “I never could have sent that vision to Marten. He would have come back drooling.”

“What was it?” The gunslinger asked. His words were blurred and shaky. He felt that if he tried to rise, his legs would buckle.

“The universe,” the man in black said carelessly. He burped and threw the bones into the fire where they glistened with unhealthy whiteness. The wind above the cup of the Golgotha whistled with keen unhappiness.

“Universe,” the gunslinger said blankly.

“You want the Tower,” the man in black said. It seemed to be a question.

“Yes.”

“But you shan’t have it,” the man in black said, and smiled with bright cruelty.

“I have an idea of how close to the edge that last pushed you. The Tower will kill you half a world away.”

“You know nothing of me,” the gunslinger said quietly, and the smile faded from the other’s lips.

“I made your father and I broke him,” the man in black said grimly. “I came to your mother through Marten and took her. It was written, and it was. I am the furthest minion of the Dark Tower. Earth has been given into my hand.”

“What did I see?” The gunslinger asked. “At the end? What was it?”

“What did it seem to be?”

The gunslinger was silent, thoughtful. He felt for his tobacco, but there was none. The man in black did not offer to refill his poke by either black magic or white.

“There was light,” the gunslinger said finally. “Great white light. And then —

” He broke off and stared at the man in black. He was leaning forward, and an alien emotion was stamped on his face, writ too large for lies or denial.

Wonder.

“You don’t know,” he said, and began to smile. “O great sorcerer who brings the dead to life. You don’t know.”

“I know,” the man in black said. “But I don’t know... what.”

“White light,” the gunslinger repeated. “And then — a blade of grass. One single blade of grass that filled every.’ thing. And I was tiny. Infinitesimal.”

“Grass.” The man in black closed his eyes. His face looked drawn and haggard. “A blade of grass. Are you sure?”

“Yes.” The gunslinger frowned. “But it was purple.”

And so the man in black began to speak.

The universe (he said) offers a paradox too great for the finite mind to grasp.

As the living brain cannot conceive of a nonliving brain — although it may think it can — the finite mind cannot grasp the infinite.

The prosaic fact of the universe’s existence single-handedly defeats the pragmatist and the cynic. There was a time, yet a hundred generations before the world moved on, when mankind had achieved enough technical and scientific prowess to chip a few splinters from the great stone pillar of reality. Even then, the false light of science (knowledge, if you like) shone in only a few developed countries. Yet, despite a tremendous increase in available facts, there were remarkably few insights. Gunslinger, our fathers

conquered the-disease-which-rots, which we call cancer, almost conquered aging, went to the moon — (“I don’t believe that,” the gunslinger said flatly, to which the man in black merely smiled and answered, “You needn’t.”) — and made or discovered a hundred other marvelous baubles. But this wealth of information produced little or no insight. There were no great odes written to the wonders of artificial insemination — (“What?” “Having babies from frozen mansperm. “

“Bullshit.” “As you wish..., although not even the ancients could produce children from that material.”)

— or to the car-which-moves. Few if any seemed to have grasped the Principle of Reality; new knowledge leads always to yet more awesome mysteries. Greater physiological knowledge of the brain makes the existence of the soul less possible yet more probable by the nature of the search. Do you see? Of course you don’t. You are surrounded by your own romantic aura, you lie cheek and jowl daily with the arcane. Yet now you approach the limits —not of belief, but of comprehension. You face reverse entropy of the soul.

But to the more prosaic:

The greatest mystery the universe offers is not life but Size. Size encompasses life, and the Tower encompasses Size. The child, who is most at home with wonder, says:

Daddy, what is above the sky? And the father says: The darkness of space. The child: What is beyond space? The father: The galaxy. The child: Beyond the galaxy? The father: Another galaxy. The child: Beyond the other galaxies? The father: No one knows.

You see? Size defeats us. For the fish, the lake in which he lives is the universe. What does the fish think when he is jerked up by the mouth through the silver limits of existence and into a new universe where the air drowns him and the light is blue madness? Where hugh bipeds with no gills stuff it into a suffocating box and cover it with wet weeds to die?

Or one might take the point of a pencil and magnify it. One reaches the point where a stunning realization strikes home: The pencil point is not solid; it is composed of atoms which whirl and revolve like a trillion demon planets. What seems solid to us is actually only a loose net held together by gravitation.

Shrunk to the correct size, the distances between these atoms might become leagues, gulfs, aeons. The atoms themselves are composed of nuclei and revolving protons and electrons. One may step down further to subatomic particles. And then to what? Tachyons? Nothing? Of course not. Everything in the universe denies nothing; to suggest conclusions to things is one impossibility.

If you fell outward to the limit of the universe, would you find a board fence and signs reading DEAD END? No. You might find something hard and rounded, as the chick must see the egg from the inside. And if you should peck through that shell, what great and torrential light might shine through your hole at the end of space? Might you look through and discover our entire universe is but part of one atom on a blade of grass? Might you be forced to think that by burning a twig you incinerate an eternity of eternities? That existence rises not to one infinite but to an infinity of them?

Perhaps you saw what place our universe plays in the scheme of things — as an atom in a blade of grass. Could it be that everything we can perceive, from the infinitesimal virus to the distant Horsehead Nebula, is contained in one blade of grass... a blade that may have existed for only a day or two in an alien time-flow? What if that blade should be cut off by a scythe? When it began to die, would the rot seep into our own universe and our own lives, turning everything yellow and brown and desiccated? Perhaps it's already begun to happen.

We say the world has moved on; maybe we really mean that it has begun to dry up.

Think how small such a concept of things makes us, gunslinger! If a God watches over it all, does He actually mete out justice for a race

of gnats among an infinitude of races of gnats? Does his eye see the sparrow fall when the sparrow is less than a speck of hydrogen floating disconnected in the depth of space?

And if He does see... what must the nature of such a God be?
Where does He live?

How is it possible to live beyond infinity?

Imagine the sand of the Mohaine Desert, which you crossed to find me, and imagine a trillion universes — not worlds but universes — encapsulated in each grain of that desert; and within each universe an infinity of others. We tower over these universes from our pitiful grass vantage point; with one swing of your boot you may knock a billion billion worlds flying off into darkness, in a chain never to be completed.

Size, gunslinger... Size....

Yet suppose further. Suppose that all worlds, all universes, met in a single nexus, a single pylon, a Tower. A stairway, perhaps, to the Godhead itself.

Would you dare, gunslinger? Could it be that somewhere above all of endless reality, there exists a Room...?

You dare not.

You dare not.

“Someone has dared,” the gunslinger said.

“Who would that be?”

“God,” the gunslinger said softly. His eyes gleamed. “God has dared... or is the room empty, seer?”

“I don’t know.” Fear passed over the man in black’s bland face, as soft and dark as a buzzard’s wing. “And, furthermore, I don’t ask. It

might be unwise.”

“Afraid of being struck dead?” The gunslinger asked sardonically.

“Perhaps afraid of an accounting,” the man in black replied, and there was silence for a while. The night was very long. The Milky Way sprawled above them in great splendor, yet terrifying in its emptiness. The gunslinger wondered what he would feel if that inky sky should split open and let in a torrent of light.

“The fire,” he said. “I’m cold.”

The gunslinger drowsed and awoke to see the man in black regarding him avidly, unhealthily.

“What are you staring at?”

“You, of course. “

“Well, don’t” He poked up the fire, ruining the precision of the idiogram. “I don’t like it.” He looked to the east to see if there was the beginning of light, but this night went on and on.

“You seek the light so soon?”

“I was made for light”

“Ah, so you were! And so impolite of me to forget the fact! Yet we have much to discuss yet, you and I. For so has it been told to me by my master.”

“Who?”

The man in black smiled. “Shall we tell the truth then, you and I? No more lies?

No more glammer?”

“Glammer? What does that mean?”

But the man in black persisted: "Shall there be truth between us, as two men?"

Not as friends, but as enemies and equals? There is an offer you will get rarely, Roland. Only enemies speak the truth. Friends and lovers lie endlessly, caught in the web of duty."

"Then we'll speak the truth." He had never spoken less on this night "Start by telling me what glammer is."

"Glammer is enchantment, gunslinger. My master's enchantment has prolonged this night and will prolong it still.., until our business is done. "

"How long will that be?"

"Long. T can tell you no better. I do not know myself." The man in black stood over the fire, and the glowing embers made patterns on his face. "Ask. I will tell you what I know. You have caught me. It is fair; I did not think you would.

Yet your quest has only begun. Ask. It will lead us to business soon enough."

"Who is your master?"

"I have never seen him, but you must. In order to reach the Tower you must reach this one first, the Ageless Stranger. " The man in black smiled spitelessly.

"You must slay him, gunslinger. Yet I think it is not what you wished to ask."

"If you've never seen him, how do you know him?"

"He came to me once in a dream. As a stripling he came to me, when I lived in a far land. A thousand years ago, or five or ten. He came to me in days before the old ones had yet to cross the sea. In a land called England. A sheaf of centuries ago he imbued me with

my duty, although there were errands in between my youth and my apotheosis. You are that, gunslinger.” He tittered. “You see, someone has taken you seriously.”

“This Stranger has no name?”

“O, he is named.”

“And what is his name?”

“Maerlyn,” the man in black said softly, and somewhere in the easterly darkness where the mountains lay a rockslide punctuated his words and a puma screamed like a woman. The gunslinger shivered and the man in black flinched. “Yet I do not think that is what you wished to ask, either. It is not your nature to think so far ahead.”

The gunslinger knew the question; it had gnawed him all this night, and he thought, for years before. It trembled on his lips but he didn’t ask it... not yet.

“This Stranger, this Maerlyn, is a minion of the Tower? Like yourself?”

“Much greater than I. It has been given to him to live backward in time. He darkies. He tincts. He is in all times. Yet there is one greater than he.”

“Who?”

“The Beast,” the man in black whispered fearfully. “The keeper of the Tower. The originator of all glammer.

“What is it? What does this Beast — “

“Ask me no more!” The man in black cried. His voice aspired to sternness and crumbled into beseechment. “I know not! I do not wish to know. To speak of the Beast is to speak of the ruination of one’s own soul. Before It, Maerlyn is as Jam to him.”

“And beyond the Beast is the Tower and whatever the Tower contains?”

“Yes,” whispered the man in black. “But none of these things are what you wish to ask.”

True.

“All right,” the gunslinger said, and then asked the world’s oldest question.

“Do I know you? Have I seen you somewhere before?”

“Yes.”

“Where?” The gunslinger leaned forward urgently. This was a question of his destiny.

The man in black clapped his hands to his mouth and giggled through them like a small child. “I think you know. “

“Where!” He was on his feet; his hands had dropped to the worn butts of his guns.

“Not with those, gunslinger. Those do not open doors; those only close them forever. “

“Where?” The gunslinger reiterated.

“Must I give him a hint?” The man in black asked the darkness. “I believe I must “He looked at the gunslinger with eyes that burned. “There was a man who gave you advice,” he said. “Your teacher — “

“Yes, Cort,” the gunslinger interrupted impatiently.

“The advice was to wait. It was bad advice. For even then Marten’s plans against your father had proceeded. And when your father returned — “

“He was killed,” the gunslinger said emptyly.

“And when you turned and looked, Marten was gone ... gone west
Yet there was a man in Marten’s entourage, a man who affected the
dress of a monk and the shaven head of a penitent — “

“Walter,” the gunslinger whispered. “You... you’re not Marten at all.
You’re Walter!”

The man in black tittered. “At your service. “

“I ought to kill you now.”

“That would hardly be fair. After all, it was I who delivered Marten
into your hands three years later, when — “

“Then you’ve controlled me.”

“In some ways, yes. But no more, gunslinger. Now comes the time of
sharing.

Then, in the morning, I will cast the runes. Dreams will come to you.
And then your real quest must begin.”

“Walter,” the gunslinger repeated, stunned.

“Sit,” the man in black invited. “I tell you my story. Yours, I think, will
be much longer. “

“I don’t talk of myself,” the gunslinger muttered.

“Yet tonight you must So that we may understand.”

“Understand what? My purpose? You know that To find the Tower is
my purpose. I’m sworn.”

“Not your purpose, gunslinger. Your mind. Your slow, plodding,
tenacious mind.

There has never been one quite like it, in all the history of the world. Perhaps in the history of creation.

“This is the time of speaking. This is the time of histories.

“Then speak.”

The man in black shook the voluminous arm of his robe. A foil-wrapped package fell out and caught the dying embers in many reflective folds.

“Tobacco, gunslinger. Would you smoke?”

He had been able to resist the rabbit, but he could not resist this. He opened the foil with eager fingers. There was fine crumbled tobacco inside, and green leaves to wrap it in, amazingly moist. He had not seen such tobacco for ten years.

He rolled two cigarettes and bit the ends of each to release flavor. He offered one to the man in black, who took it. Each of them took a burning twig from the fire.

The gunslinger lit his cigarette and drew the aromatic smoke deep into his lungs, closing his eyes to concentrate the senses. He blew out with long, slow satisfaction.

“Is it good?” the man in black enquired.

“Yes. Very good.”

“Enjoy it. It may be the last smoke for you in a very long time.”

The gunslinger took this impassively.

“Very well,” the man in black said. “To begin then: “You must understand that the Tower has always been, and there have always been boys who know of it and lust for it, more than power or riches or women.. “

There was talk then, a night's worth of talk and God alone knew how much more, but the Gunslinger remembered little of it later... and to his oddly practical mind, little of it seemed to matter. The man in black told him that he must go to the sea, which lay no more than twenty easy miles to the west, and there he would be invested with the power of drawing.

"But that's not exactly right, either," the man in black said, pitching his cigarette into the remains of the campfire. "No one wants to invest you with a power of any kind, gunslinger; it is simply in you, and I am compelled to tell you, partly because of the sacrifice of the boy, and partly because it is the law; the natural law of things. Water must run downhill, and you must be told.

You will draw three, I understand... but I don't really care, and I don't really want to know."

"The three," the gunslinger murmured, thinking of the Oracle.

"And then the fun begins. But, by then, I'll be long gone. Good-bye, gunslinger.

My part is done now. The chain is still in your hands. Beware it doesn't wrap itself around your neck."

Compelled by something outside him, Roland said, "You have one more thing to say, don't you?"

"Yes," the man in black said, and he smiled at the gunslinger with his depthless eyes and stretched one of his hands out toward him. "Let there be light."

And there was light.

Roland awoke by the ruins of the campfire to find himself ten years older. His black hair had thinned at the temples and gone the gray of cobwebs at the end of autumn. The lines in his face were deeper, his skin rougher.

The remains of the wood he had carried had turned to ironwood, and the man in black was a laughing skeleton in a rotting black robe, more bones in this place of bones, one more skull in Golgotha.

The gunslinger stood up and looked around. He looked at the light and saw that the light was good.

With a sudden quick gesture he reached toward the remains of his companion of the night before.., a night that had somehow lasted ten years. He broke off Walter's jawbone and jammed it carelessly into the left hip pocket of his jeans — a fitting enough replacement for the one lost under the mountains.

The Tower. Somewhere ahead, it waited for him — the nexus of Time, the nexus of Size.

He began west again, his back set against the sunrise, heading toward the ocean, realizing that a great passage of his life had come and gone. "I loved you, Jake," he said aloud.

The stiffness wore out of his body and he began to walk more rapidly. By that evening he had come to the end of the land. He sat on a beach which stretched left and right forever, deserted. The waves beat endlessly against the shore, pounding and pounding. The setting sun painted the water in a wide strip of fool's gold.

There the gunslinger sat, his face turned up into the fading light. He dreamed his dreams and watched as the stars came out; his purpose did not flag, nor did his heart falter; his hair, finer now and gray, blew around his head, and the sandalwood-inlaid guns of his father lay smooth and deadly against his hips, and he was lonely but did not find loneliness in any way a bad or ignoble thing. The dark came down on the world and the world moved on. The gunslinger waited for the time of the drawing and dreamed his long dreams of the Dark Tower, to which he would some day come at dusk and approach, winding his horn, to do some unimaginable final battle.