An Antihero‘s Journey to the Dark Tower

Manifestations and Variations of the Hero‘s Journey in Stephen King‘s The Dark Tower Series

Ritgerð til MA-prófs í Enskukennslu

Sigríður Aðils Magnúsdóttir

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Abstract
This essay examines the Hero’s Journey of Roland Deschain and his companions in Stephen King’s *The Dark Tower* series (1982-2007). The essay begins by looking at Stephen King as an author, his extraordinary career and why so many critics simply dismiss him due to the nature of his work. Then, *The Dark Tower* series is discussed as well as its connection to Robert Browning’s poem “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” (1855). Furthermore, Roland, the protagonist of the series, is viewed with regards to the duality of his role as both a hero and an antihero. Roland is examined through the concept of the Dark Triad of Personality, explaining how he falls into the category of an antihero and why it is necessary for the completion of his journey that he make critical changes to his character. Roland’s heroic qualities are also examined along with his journey of self-discovery and continual change as the series progresses and what effects this might have on the series. Moreover, the characters and series as a whole are compared to the stages of Christopher Vogler’s *Writer’s Journey* (1992), while Joseph Campbell’s concepts in *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) are also referenced. Each stage of Vogler's theory is examined and compared with King’s narrative, exploring the similarities as well as the discrepancies. Characters and events of the series are explored with regards to the manifestations and variations of the stages of the Hero’s Journey as extrapolated by Vogler’s theories.
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1 Introduction

For decades, the concept of the Hero’s journey or the Monomyth has been elaborated on in much detail. According to Palumbo it has been replicated repeatedly utilizing Joseph Campbell’s theory as explicated in his large-scale work on the subject, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), both before and after its publication. Palumbo states that “*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* is arguably one of the many great intellectual achievements of the twentieth century, and in it Campbell derives the monomyth from the lives of Christ, Mohamed, and the Buddha, from dream analysis, and from the mythologies, fairy tales [and] legends” (1-2). Scholars have used Campbell’s structure to analyze works from the *Odyssey and the Iliad* to *The Matrix* (1999) and *Ready Player One* (2011). The popularity of this specific mode of storytelling seems to be endless. As a matter of fact, the theory behind the monomyth has been utilized for all manner of narratives and has especially gained popularity within the world of filmmaking. Director George Lukas, for instance, was heavily influenced by Campbell’s work whilst writing his epic screenplay for *Star Wars* (1977). However, due to the complexity and length of Campbell’s text, many of those who are interested in utilizing the structure of the monomyth within their own writing have preferred to delve into the work of Christopher Vogler as detailed in *The Writer’s Journey* (1993). Here Vogler elaborates on and analyses the Hero’s Journey as it adheres to screenplay rather than to mythological narratives. This application of the theory, therefore, tends to adhere better to modern narratives as well as screenplay, making Vogler’s approach a better choice for more contemporary work.

Stephen King’s magnum opus *The Dark Tower* series (1982-2004) adheres to the structure of the monomyth. King may very well be one of the most popular authors of all time and the *Dark Tower* novels his grandest work, but due to his reputation for simply adhering to the horror genre, as well as the harsh criticism he has often received by literary critics, very little has been written on this specific work from a scholarly point of view. For some reason, scholars seem to be content analyzing King’s earlier works such as *Carrie* (1974), *The Shining* (1977) and *The Stand* (1978); therefore, the *Dark Tower* has repeatedly been left out when it comes to literary analysis. However, there are some books that have been written on the subject. For instance, there is Bev Vincent’s *The Road to the Dark Tower* (2004) where he looks at each individual book in the series and offers an in-depth analysis. Also, Robin Furth’s *Stephen King’s The Dark Tower: A Concordance* (Volume I) (2003) contains a detailed listing of every character, place and object of any meaning mentioned in the series up to and including the fourth book of the series. King recruited Furth to create this book in order for him to easily be
able to look up any small detail during the writing process of the last three books of the series. These two works are more focused on a detailed retelling and explanation of the events and characters of King’s books rather than deep analytical work. In addition, there is Patrick McAleer’s *Inside the Dark Tower Series: Art, Evil, and Intertextuality in the Stephen King Novels* (2009). This book, as the title suggests, covers much of the intertextuality specifically relevant to the *Dark Tower* novels. Accordingly, even though not much has been written on *The Dark Tower*, these works are important when exploring the Hero’s Journey as it appears in the series.

When applying Campbell and Vogler’s theory to King’s magnum opus it is necessary to be aware of its origins. The story itself is adapted from Robert Browning’s poem “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” (1855), an epic poem comprised of thirty-four stanzas that traces its roots to both Romanticism and chivalric Arthurian legends. The epic, heroic nature of Browning’s poem, as well as its grand scale, is transferred into King’s narrative where Roland’s quest for the tower spans seven books. That being said, King’s story is not just an adaptation of Browning’s poem, as he was also heavily influenced by Sergio Leone’s spaghetti westerns and the extensiveness of J.R.R Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955). The vastness and emptiness of the desert specifically inspired him to create a story with a similar scope to Tolkien’s creation but situated in a western landscape. All these works contain an element of the heroic quest that adheres well to the theories of both Campbell and Vogler.

However, there are aspects in which this narrative deviates from the model of the monomyth. Firstly, Roland, the main protagonist of the story, cannot truly be categorized as a hero; rather, he is an antihero, one that specifically falls into the categorization of the Dark Triad as well as adhering to various other definitions of an antihero. Vogler explains that an antihero is in fact a specific type of hero and, as such, should still follow the models of the monomyth (34-35). However, due to the spirit of Roland’s journey, as well as how the story unfolds and the ways in which he displays his antiheroic nature, there are changes he must make should he ever wish to fully complete his quest. To save his soul from condemnation he must be willing to endanger the search for the tower to save the life of a friend.

Another deviation from the structure of the hero’s journey is the fact that other main characters of the story, Roland’s companions, take on many of the roles of the quintessential hero of the monomyth. Roland takes on the part of the mentor, whilst both Eddie and Susannah become the reluctant heroes who need to be called to the adventure and, subsequently, cross
the threshold and deal with various threshold guardians, of which there are many. Numerous other elements of the monomyth are completed by all of these characters together as a group, which for them comes naturally since they are ka-tet, as explained by Furth: “[l]iterally speaking, ka-tet means ‘one from many’. Ka refers to destiny; tet refers to a group of people with the same interests or goals. Ka-tet is the place where men’s lives are joined by fate” (198). Furthermore, though the whole story arch of the series does follow the main stages of the Monomyth, each book of the series is also its own stand-alone version of a Hero’s Journey. Given all of this, The Dark Tower novels by Stephen King do follow the recipe of the monomyth but simultaneously provide variations to some of its ingredients, so that some of the main stages manifest in ways uncommon to Campbell and Vogler’s theories.

2 Background

King’s version of *The Dark Tower* dates back to almost a decade before the publication of his first instalment. In Vincent’s *The Road to the Dark Tower* he explains that King and his wife Tabitha had inherited “reams of brightly colored paper nearly as thick as cardboard” (7). For some reason, this paper fascinated King and he decided this was where he would begin writing his epic tale based on Browning’s poem. Even so, this did not come easy to him:

> Sections were written during a dry spell in the middle of *Salem’s Lot*, and another part was written after he finished *The Shining*. Even when he wasn’t actively working on the *Dark Tower*, his mind often turned to the story – except, he says, when he was battling Randall Flagg in *The Stand*, which is ironic since both Flagg and a superflu-decimated world became part of the *Dark Tower* mythos many years later. (Vincent 8)

Thus, it seems as though *The Dark Tower* has followed King throughout his career, even though the writing process did prove challenging at times. For example, there was a short period of time when the series was in danger of being abandoned. King elaborates on this in a foreword to Furth’s *Dark Tower Concordance* and states that:

> It is a miracle the story was ever finished at all, but perhaps an even greater one that a second volume ever followed the first […]. The manuscript of that first volume, wet and barely readable was rescued from a moldy cellar. The first forty handwritten pages of a second volume […] were missing. God knows where they wound up. (vii)

Even though all the books went through an arduous birthing process, and sometimes as much as six years passed between instalments, King describes it as his own magnum opus and has stated that this is a story that will never truly be fully told. The writing process of this epic took such a toll that after the publication of the last book, *The Dark Tower*, in 2004 King even announced his retirement from writing altogether. Although it is clear he has not held true to that announcement as he even added an eighth book, *The Wind Through the Key-hole*, to the series in 2012.

While the books themselves span 4000 pages, there are other texts that pertain to Roland and his story. In addition to the *Dark Tower* series, King has written short stories that tell of Roland and his youth, as well as including the world of the *Dark Tower* in *Black House* (2001), a book he wrote in collaboration with Peter Straub. This all serves to expand the epic
nature of King’s work and is a factor that makes his *Dark Tower* series adhere further to the model of the Hero’s Journey.

**2a Stephen King**

Not only is Stephen King one of the world’s most popular authors, he is also one of the most prolific. Wiater et al. state that even though other writers, such as Tom Clancy and John Grisham, may have surpassed him from time to time as America’s most popular author “no writer in modern times has had the staying power of Stephen King. His accomplishments in terms of worldwide sales and motion picture and television miniseries adaptations are, to say the least extraordinary” (xx). Since the publication of his first novel, *Carrie*, King has published over four dozen novels, a handful of novellas, and various short story collections in addition to two nonfiction books, screenplays and e-books. King has written his material both on his own and in cooperation with other authors. Recently, he wrote and published a book with his son Owen King, and for a while he wrote under the pseudonym of Richard Bachman. Now, at the age of 71, his popularity is at an all-time high. According to his official website *stephenking.com*, King shows no signs of slowing down and will soon be publishing a novel, a novella, an anthology, as well as participating in the production of a television series (2018). Furthermore, multiple adaptations based on his work have been made throughout the years, many of which have become instant cult classics.

King’s ongoing success is not only measured by how prolific he is as an author but also, in large part, by the faithfulness of his fans. It is clear that “the boogeyman of Bangor, Maine” (Brehm 1) has managed to build quite the loyal fan base over the years. King has dubbed these loyal fans the Constant Reader and Strengell notes that; “In King’s vocabulary the Constant Reader is anyone who reads his fiction on a regular basis” (6). King first used the term in the preface to *Different Seasons* (1982) and has, since then, made a habit of addressing the Constant Reader directly in the preface or afterword of his novels: thus, effectively forming a kind of relationship between himself and his readers and often giving direct thanks for their loyalty. Strengell, furthermore, notes King’s humility and gratitude and states that:

King’s deep-seated respect for his Constant Reader contributes to his success as a writer […] Interpretative communities can be applied to King and his Constant Readers in the sense that in close interaction with his audience the writer is able to produce texts that meet the audience’s expectations. (6)
This closeness to his most loyal fan base, as well as his attentiveness to their needs as an audience and his ability to acquiesce to those needs, are the most prevalent reasons for King’s ongoing success.

King also gained a large following due to his origins as a horror writer, as all of King’s earliest work can be categorized within the genre of horror. He followed his debut novel Carrie, with an even more horrifying novel, Salem’s Lot (1975), and went on to write The Shining. Similarly, his many collections of short stories mostly feature the macabre. Throughout his career, King has been heavily influenced by the works of such notable authors as H. P. Lovecraft, Edgar Allan Poe and Robert E. Howard. However, King states in On Writing (2002), that during his formative years, his biggest influence was gained from movies: “Horror movies, science fiction movies, movies about teenage gangs on the prowl, movies about losers on motorcycles—this was the stuff that turned my dials up to ten” (45). Subsequently, his first short stories, written during preadolescence, were mostly adaptations of these films, as well as retakes on various works by Lovecraft, Poe and other prominent Gothic writers. Thus, he honed his skills by constantly writing horror-based short stories and submitting them to various magazines, and some of them were published. Therefore, it is no wonder King entered the literary scene as a horror writer.

Ironically, due to King’s predilection for the modern horror genre, critics tend to dismiss him as a pulp writer. Even so, King does not shy away from answering such criticisms; in an interview with Playboy Magazine he stated that: “Those avatars of high culture hold it almost as an article of religious faith that plot and story must be subordinated to style, whereas my deeply held conviction is that story must be paramount, because it defines the entire work of fiction” (Breham 67). Hitherto, King has held to his own conviction and favors contemporary American stories about real people over lofty works of art. McAleer goes on to say that there are difficulties associated with being a popular contemporary author whilst adhering to the literary canon, and that King is by no means the first author to encounter such difficulties:

King’s contribution to bridging the gap that exists among both the serious and literary writers is not a recent innovation or an inexplicable phenomenon as his predecessor, Robert Browning, navigated this dilemma with his poetry and fiction […] Like King, Robert Browning’s writing has endured questions of literary merit, and while Browning’s poem, “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came“, the work upon which King bases his
tale, has also been treated as an anomaly in his canon, this distinction has not deterred scholars from offering a wide selection of criticism and scholarly examination. (18)

There will always be those who are predisposed to dislike literature that does not adhere to the more canonical methods of writing. Those are the individuals who tend to dismiss King’s work as cheap and gory.

That being said, there are a handful of critics that do admire King’s work. In 1989 Breham published a book called *The Stephen King Companion*, a collection of interviews and articles on King. This book includes an article by Michael R. Collings where he speculates as to why King has received such harsh criticism throughout the years and observes that “He writes for a popular audience – and academicians hate that. He tells stories for the sake of stories – and theorists hate that. He assumes the pose of naïve storyteller – and doctoral candidates hate that” (204). Badley agrees and finds that, King has a fundamental understanding of American culture and manages to “[Absorb] the images, sounds, and textures of consumer culture seamlessly into his style, his texts manage to do what nothing else could do quite so well: they made readers forget they were reading” (17). Consequently, there are those who go as far as to compare him to such prodigious writers as Mark Twain and Charles Dickens. Davis concurs and adds that “What makes King such a vital contributor to American literature is that he has combined a wholeness of vision with a thorough education in past significant fictions concerned with American life – fictions best exemplified in works by Twain, Faulkner, O’Connor and John Steinbeck” (31). Thus, it is clear that even though there are critics who dismiss King’s work as being purely horror pulp, there are those who appreciate his talent for connecting with his audience through his understanding of modern culture.

Despite all this, when looking at his whole body of work, it becomes evident that classifying King solely as a horror writer does not do his body of work justice. Although King’s best-known work may belong to the world of the macabre, he is still an incredibly versatile author and has successfully tried his hand at various genres, such as fantasy, science fiction, mystery and even children’s literature. Ingebretsen acknowledges King’s versatility and notes that he “continuously changes his mode; *The Colorado Kid* (2005) is a revisionist Noir, and shows King’s inability to keep within genre boundary lines. The self-critical Gothicism of the later King, then, is of a very different sort than the bumps and chills of his earlier, less nuanced work” (208). Despite this fact, it has proven near to impossible for King to shake off the stamp of the horror genre from his work. Even when working completely out of his normal spectrum
on novels such as *The Dark Tower* series where he mixes various genres, most prominently that of the western, science fiction and fantasy, they still get labelled as works of horror. McAleer points out the blurbs from several of King’s *Dark Tower* paper back publications: “Set in a world of ominous landscape and macabre menace that is a dark mirror of our own” (41, bold type original). All the blurbs utilize a similar vernacular in the description of the books with words such as “horror”, “haunts”, “nightmares”, “damnation” and “evil”, so that “[w]ith the constant attention given to horror either observed or foregrounded in King’s fiction, it could be reasonably concluded that no matter how hard King tries his fiction will always fall under this category” (41). Thus, even if he wanted to, King will never truly be able to get rid of the stamp of horror writer.

**2b The Dark Tower Series**

It is a known fact that King’s *Dark Tower* series is an adaptation of Robert Browning’s epic poem “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came”. In 1989 King did an interview with Castle Rock News to talk about the *Dark Tower* series, in which he states:

> The idea of writing this dark fantasy series came from a favorite poem, Robert Browning’s “Child [*sic*] Roland to the Dark Tower Came” […] Browning never says what that tower is, but it’s based on an even older tradition about Childe Roland that’s lost in antiquity. Nobody knows who wrote it, and nobody knows what the Dark Tower is. ([stephenking.com](http://stephenking.com))

Thus, Browning himself found inspiration for Childe Roland from another source, and in fact, the inspiration for his poem came from Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. Cronin explains that “the mad Edgar sings a song in which the line ‘Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came’ occurs without context or explanation” (73). Though it is unclear from where Shakespeare sought this brief melody it was clearly compelling enough for Browning to compose a heroic poem, thirty-four stanzas long. The inspiration behind the poem is more complex than one short quote though, and Harold Golder claims that due to the nature of the story depicted in the poem, it was clear that “behind Browning’s *Childe Roland* lies a vast contributory reservoir of chivalric romance” (963). Hence, Browning found inspiration in Arthurian legends and romantic tales to create his own legendary tale of Roland’s quest through his epic poem. Browning’s version of the story is in fact an agglomeration of heroic narrative, romance and Arthurian legends, all vastly popular at the time he wrote his poem. In the Castel Rock News interview, King states that no one truly knows what the Dark Tower is. It is intriguing that after all the hardship and
loss Childe Roland endures on his quest, Browning’s last stanza leaves him before he actually enters the tower:

There they stood, ranged along the hillsides, met
To view the last of me, a living frame
For one more picture! In a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew. ‘Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.’ (199-204)

What is clear is that Browning’s poem is a depiction of a hero’s journey. Roland bears the title of Childe, which according to the Collins dictionary is “a young man of noble birth, esp. a candidate for knighthood”. As such, this aspiring knight is on a quest to the unexplained Dark Tower and thus ventures through the stages of the Hero’s Journey. Not only is Childe Roland on an actual quest for the Tower but he is also on an inward quest. Presented as a dramatic monologue, the poem depicts the nightmarish landscape residing within the narrator’s mind as well as his surroundings. Death and loss encompass him as he struggles to find meaning in the world around him and reach his Dark Tower. On this quest, Childe Roland must overcome many of the obstacles of the Hero’s Journey.

Even though the Dark Tower series is an adaptation of Browning’s poem, King sought inspiration from various genres and narratives when creating his modern version of the tale. Most prominent of these are Sergio Leonie’s spaghetti westerns, more specifically The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly (1966), and J.R.R. Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings. In the foreword to Gunslinger, King mentions being inspired by the atmosphere created in Leonie’s work:

It was called The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, and before the film was even half over, I realized that what I wanted to write was a novel that contained Tolkien’s sense of quest and magic but set against Leone’s almost absurdly majestic Western backdrop […] what I wanted even more than the setting was that feeling of epic apocalyptic size. (xv)

Thus, King merges Browning’s character of Childe Roland with Tolkien’s epic fairytale-quest and Leonie’s archetypal western setting. He also enhances Browning’s existing connection of the character of Roland to Arthurian legends by making him a descendant of Arthur Eld and having him carry guns forged from the steel of Excalibur. By integrating this old narrative with
more contemporary ones, King manages to expand the scope of this heroic quest whilst adhering to Sander’s theory of adaptation by “mak[ing] the text ‘relevant’ or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the process of proximation and updating” (23). Thereby, King creates his own modern version of an Arthurian knight on a quest whilst still telling the story of Roland and his journey to the Dark Tower. By seeking inspiration from various genres and narratives, King has expanded the narrative of Childe Roland and modernized it.

To fully appreciate the representation of the Hero’s Journey within King’s narrative, it is necessary to briefly explain the story. The protagonist is Roland Deschain and for centuries he has been on a quest to find the Dark Tower and save it from destruction. This tower is in fact a nexus between all worlds and its ruin would mark the obliteration of the entire universe. In the foreword to Wolves, King states that “The Dark Tower is Roland’s obsession, his grail, his only reason for living when we meet him” (XI). So, true to the Hero’s Journey, Roland is also on the road to self-discovery and improvement.

When the reader is first introduced to Roland, he is not much more than a cold-blooded killer, willing to sacrifice anything to reach his goal. Furth states that because Roland thinks his solitude is a necessity for the completion of his goal “he sacrifices all human relationships, even when it means betrayal, because he thinks such sacrifice will speed him along his way. Comrades and lovers are left behind like abandoned waterskins” (2). The irony is that to complete his journey, he must draw others to his aid. Should he continue his journey alone, he would in fact be condemning both his quest and his own soul. His own betterment and fundamental understanding of his quest will come only from the connection he will make with his companions. His salvation lies within his ability to change the way he views himself and others.

These other characters are drawn from a parallel universe, the Real World, and they must learn to adjust to their new reality and accept their new lot in life in order to help Roland on his journey. They are: Eddie Dean, a heroin addict drawn from 1980’s New-York; Susannah Dean, an African-American woman who lost her legs from the knees down when she was pushed in front of a train, drawn from 1960’s New-York; Jake Cambers, an eleven-year-old boy who is drawn from 1970’s New-York and finally Oy, the Billy-bumbler, an animal native to Mid-World, befriended by Jake and an important part of their ka-tet. These characters, along with Roland, all take on the role of hero throughout the narrative.
King’s version of the *Dark Tower* adheres, in many ways, to Browning’s poem though the ending deviates greatly from the poem. Roland has an arduous journey to the Tower but does reach it in the end, alone. Where King’s version diverges the most is that after breaching the tower and entering the room at the top, Roland is transported to the very beginning of his quest. As a consequence, the last paragraph of the *The Dark Tower* is practically identical to the first paragraph of *Gunslinger*. It is revealed that Roland has been on this same quest time and time again without being aware of it and is doomed to repeat his journey until he gains a complete understanding of his own self and has obtained the necessary personal growth to move on and make the right choices. Otherwise he will continue his quest of saving and entering the Tower for eternity.
3 The Hero’s Journey

For as long as people have been talking, they have made up stories and myths that all adhere to certain narrative structures and rules. The art of storytelling is an inextricable part of human nature and there are endless different models of stories in existence. Joseph Campbell was the first person to formulate the concept of the Hero’s Journey. He noticed that stories spanning centuries and regions all share the same pattern or outline. Subsequently, he coined the concept Hero’s Journey, or the Monomyth, which he then elaborated on in great detail in his influential book on the subject, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Vogler praises Campbell’s discovery and states that; “Joseph Campbell’s great accomplishment was to articulate clearly something that had been there all along— the life principles embedded in the structure of stories” (xv). Palumbo takes this further, stating that:

The monomyth *per se* is so deeply engaging because it deals essentially with the process, and difficulty of negotiating life’s many transitions […] (These rituals serve to protect us from two truths – that change is unavoidable and that the individual is insignificant in the cosmic scheme of things – by implying that the ritual itself causes and controls change and by focusing on the individual who is to be transformed by the ritual.) Thus, the monomyth’s innate theme is transcendence, getting past what you are in order to become what you are becoming. And its underlying message is the message of mythology: that all of life’s many metamorphoses, and the challenges they engender, happen to everyone.

Batty agrees, arguing that “the Hero’s Journey, then, is more than the sum of its parts: it is a physical encounter with a world that actually serves to emotionally transform the protagonist” (81). Campbell maintains that almost all mythological stories follow a similar pattern, one that can specifically be seen in heroic mythological legends and tales such as Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings*, Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and even more recent works such as Earnest Cline’s *Ready Player One*, Christopher Paolini’s *Eragon* (2002) and all of J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* novels (1997-2007). These, as well as countless other narratives, old and new, have been found to adhere to Campbell’s concept of the Monomyth.

The concept of the Hero’s Journey has often been specifically utilized to create a compelling storyline. Thus, many filmmakers have been greatly inspired by Campbell’s influential book and many of the favorites on the big screen follow this same pattern. According to Kapell and Shelton, George Lucas specifically utilized the stages in Campbell’s book when
creating the *Star Wars* saga; he even “publicly declare[d] that the writings of Campbell had rescued him during his attempts to create his first *Star Wars* script” (22). This created a sort of spiritual connection between Lucas and Campbell, which according to Batty “led Lucas, in 1983, to invite Campbell to his Skywalker Ranch and share with him a viewing of the completed *Star Wars* trilogy” (41). Therefore, the concept of the Hero’s Journey can in fact be used as a basic formula for writing compelling stories and has been used as such since the publication of Campbell’s book.

**3a Theoretical Background: Campbell and Vogler**

The Monomyth clearly divides the journey of the hero into three main stages, which Campbell found to be the pivotal points of the Hero’s Journey: “The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation—initiation—return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth” (581). These three stages represent the journey the hero must venture into if the completion of his quest is to be successful. Each stage is then divided into further stages, seventeen in all. The first stage, that of Separation or Departure, contains the Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call, Supernatural Aid, the Crossing of the First Threshold and the Belly of the Whale. The second stage of Initiation represents the adventures and dangers that befall the hero whilst on his quest and this stage includes the Road of Trials, the Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as the Temptress, Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis and the Ultimate Boon. Finally, the Return stage elaborates what happens to the hero on his journey back home and what he has gained on his quest, be it knowledge, power, wisdom or material wealth; this stage contains the Magic Flight, Rescue from Without, the Crossing of the Return Threshold, Master of the Two Worlds and Freedom to Live (43-224).

Even though Campbell may have been the first to identify and elaborate on the Monomyth, he is not the only one to have analyzed the concept. In 1993 Christopher Vogler published *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, a book based on Campbell’s concepts. In order to reach a broader audience, Vogler felt that the concept of the Hero’s Journey could be presented in a more modern and accessible way. Being a Hollywood screenwriter, as well as a teacher, he wanted to elaborate, condense, and modernize Campbell’s theories to provide an accessible and practical guide for future screenwriters. To begin with, his version was simply a memo comprised of several pages he called “A Practical Guide to The Hero with a Thousand Faces”, wherein he described, in a succinct manner, the meaning behind Campbell’s book, utilizing examples from classic and current films (Vogler xxix). This he
passed around to friends and colleagues and eventually, due to increased demand, he expanded the memo into the *Writer’s Journey*. Thus, with his work, Vogler offers a modern take on Campbell’s existing concepts.

Much like Campbell’s *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Vogler’s *Writer’s Journey* is split into several different stages. However, whereas Campbell’s stages are seventeen in total, Vogler has compacted them into twelve. They are: Ordinary World, Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call, Meeting with the Mentor, Crossing the First Threshold, Tests, Allies, Enemies, Approach to the Inmost Cave, Ordeal, Reward (Seizing the Sword), the Road Back, Resurrection, and Return with the Elixir (Vogler 8). This simplified version serves to aid in the creation of heroic, mythological screenplays. Vogler has made a simplified image of the journey where he divides the twelve stages into three acts (fig. 1).

![Diagram of stages of the journey](image)

*Fig. 1*

Furthermore, an outline juxtaposing Campbell and Vogler’s terminology can be seen in Table One on page 6 of *The Writer’s Journey*. So, both Campbell and Vogler divide the concept of the Monomyth into several fixed stages. However, Vogler condenses the journey into fewer stages than Campbell.

**3b Roland as Antihero: The Dark Triad**

Not all protagonists of major literary works are true heroes; in fact many of them are best described as antiheroes. Often, when antiheroes are mentioned, people automatically associate the term with a villain. This is not the case, even when many of their actions are indeed villainous. In Abram’s *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, an anti-hero is described thusly:
The chief person in a modern novel or play whose character is widely discrepant from that which we associate with the traditional protagonist or hero of a serious literary work. Instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power, or heroism, the antihero is petty, ignominious, passive, ineffectual, or dishonest [...] The antihero is especially conspicuous in dramatic tragedy, in which the protagonist had usually been of high estate, dignity, and courage [...] Extreme instances are the characters who people a world stripped of certainties, values, or even meaning. (11)

Furthermore, Vogler asserts that “Simply stated, an Anti-hero is not the opposite of a Hero, but a specialized kind of Hero, one who may be an outlaw or a villain from the point of view of society [...] We identify with these outsiders because we have all felt like outsiders at one time or another” (34-35). The antihero has a wider spectrum than both the hero and the villain, as he does not see things purely in black and white but operates more in the spectrum of the grey. Even so, many antiheroes commit villainous deeds that they deem justifiable if the outcome can be perceived as heroic.

According to Furst, the time of the hero was at its height during the Romantic period. That was a time when people idealized and romanticized human greatness in all its glory. The Romantic hero, or the Byronic hero, was an ideal human being and “both his handsomeness and his freedom from mundane concerns raise him to the level of an idealized glamorous figure sharply distinguished from the characteristic modern anti-hero” (55). Not only is the Romantic hero the main focus of attention of this period, often he is the only actual human figure to be found within the narrative. Furthermore, he tends to be portrayed as much more heroic than his predecessors had been. His place is right in the center of works that only exist to present this character that overshadows everyone else to the point of exclusion (55-56). Because of this concept of the sole hero, many of the literary works of the period simply bear the names of their hero, such as Byron’s Manfred (1817) or Obermann (1804) by Étienne Pivert de Senancour. This is the time when the Romantic hero flourished, he was unburdened by normal human flaws and all his deeds could be seen as purely heroic.

Then, with the arrival of Modernism, the Byronic hero changed and became more human. This change included all the flaws associated with humanity. Consequently, many potential heroes turned into antiheroes, according to Neimneh:

Modern anti-heroism captures the intellectual, moral, and cultural sensibility associated with modernism. A changing society with a changing cultural climate necessitated a
change in the models of heroism. Literary genres such as classical epics, tragedies, and romances were no longer there for the display of extraordinary heroism, and the modern anti-hero became the novelistic “everyman.” (76)

According to Jonason et al., the modern antihero often suffers from a psychological condition called the Dark Triad of a personality composed of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (192). Paulhus and Williams explain that “[d]espite their diverse origins, the personalities composing this Dark Triad share a number of features. To varying degrees, all three entail a socially malevolent character with behavior tendencies toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness” (557). These new heroes had significant personality flaws. For some reason, people tend to connect better to these types of heroes, since within them they see an everyman who is flawed but is still working towards a specific goal. Thus, it is safe to say that Modernism brought with it a major change to the quintessential hero.

These personality flaws are exactly the reason why so many antiheroes have gained popularity. Jonason et al. go on to explain that the most popular television and movie characters of today, characters like House, Walter White, Batman, Dexter and James Bond, all seem to encompass this Dark Triad of personality. They maintain that “[i]nstead of treating the dark side of human nature as inherently maladaptive, we provide an alternative view that, despite their costs, traits like these can confer reproductive and survival benefits for the individual” (192). As a further explanation they take Dr. House from House, M.D (2004-2012) as a specific example of an antihero who clearly encompasses the three traits of the Dark Triad and the appeal this specific character seems to have to viewers:

He often justifies his lack of concern for his patients by pointing out that the ends (curing the patient) is what should ultimately matter [...] He is a regular customer of prostitutes, fails to uphold his long-term relationship with Cuddy (who is also his boss), abuses prescription medication (Vicodin), takes risks (jumping from his hotel balcony into a pool), and rides a motorcycle to work, despite a bad leg that requires the use of a cane [...] The show’s success is a testament to the appeal of a man who is, essentially, a jerk. In our minds, this is one of the earliest shows that capitalized on antihero appeal. (196)

House, M.D. was aired for eight seasons and during that time received numerous awards and nominations. These awards show that the antiheroic Dark Triad character has a clear appeal to audiences and critics alike. Vogler states that “[w]e love these characters because they are
rebels, thumbing their noses at society as we would all like to do” (35). It might be due to the outrageous way these characters allow themselves to behave, or that they are more relatable than the bright and shiny Byronic hero who operates purely in the world of the black and white, never entering the grey scale of the everyman.

Even though Roland Deschain is the protagonist, and as such, the hero of *The Dark Tower* series, he can clearly be defined as an antihero. McAleer observes:

> As Roland sacrifices his friends and his companions for the tower, murders his sons (both biological [Mordred] and surrogate [Jake]), and is possessed by an unwavering determination to reach the Dark Tower at all costs […] King creates more than an enigmatic figure that is both revered and despised by readers and characters within the series. King creates a character whose inner demons and myopic world view are easily transcribed onto most any reader, prompting the examination of the self that seems to be the goal of most serious writing. The prideful pursuit of a quixotic goal without considerations for humanity and one’s own soul are undoubtedly themes and makings of a novel directed at significant contemplations. (19)

Accordingly, many of Roland’s actions and personality traits are clear cut examples of antiheroic qualities. He is a ruthless killer who stops at nothing to reach his goal. At the beginning of his quest, he does not hesitate to commit murder or betray those he holds dear. Indeed, when scrutinized, he does show tendencies that comply with each of the personality traits of the Dark Triad.

The first trait mentioned in the Dark Triad is narcissism. Even though narcissism is often the least applicable trait of the Dark Triad, Roland is not devoid of it. Jonason et al. do state that “narcissism may be a milder trait, whereas the other two Dark Triad traits are correlated with more antisocial outcomes” (194). This adheres well to the character of Roland for he does not possess many self-loving qualities. Jonason et al. go on to elaborate on narcissism and say it is often comprised of grandiosity and lack of empathy as well as the need for admiration (194). Since Roland is born of nobility, he does have a measure of grandiosity to his character. In a way, his feeling of obligation, to complete his journey and save the tower from destruction can be seen as narcissistic. He sees it as his task, his curse, his cross to bear, and since he must be the one to save the tower, he can also dictate how that should be done. This feeling of grandiosity is then followed by lack of empathy. An extremely large part of Roland’s existence has evolved around the hunt for the man in black, and he has sacrificed
everything to catch up with him. This has resulted in Roland’s lack of empathy, as he has become incapable of understanding other people’s feelings and emotions. These are flaws that are categorized as narcissistic.

When it comes to psychopathy Roland fits the bill. Jonason et al state that “[p]sychologists define psychopathy as a particular constellation of antisocial behaviors and emotions, including shallow affect, low remorse, low fear, low empathy, egocentrism, exploitativeness, manipulativeness, impulsivity, aggression, and criminality” (194). There are many instances where Roland shows signs of psychopathy. For instance, in Gunslinger he shoots every man, woman and child in the town of Tull, beginning with his lover Allie. When shooting, Roland goes into a haze, he stops thinking and just lets his instincts kick in, and there is no fear in him in a situation where most people would be terrified. Although he does feel the need to confess this deed to Brown, his remorse does not seem completely genuine. Roland’s manipulativeness and shallow affect can also be seen in Gunslinger when Walter maliciously puts eleven-year-old Jake into Roland’s path. Without Roland, Jake will be lost in the desert and thus he must put all his trust in him. Roland betrays Jake’s trust because he believes this is what he must do to secure his path to the Tower. In her blog post on the Dark Tower series, Webb quotes King (Gunslinger 153) and says:

He knowingly lies to Jake when Jake demands to know if Roland intends to sacrifice him to the man in black. Roland assures Jake that he will be safe, that everything will be all right, and once this lie is spoken, ‘[the gunslinger] felt something happen in his mind. An uncoupling. This was the moment at which the small figure before him ceased to be Jake and become [sic] only the boy, an impersonality to be moved and used’.

(Hillaryswebb.com)

Roland could well have turned back to save Jake from falling, but that would have meant losing sight of the man in black again and thus the road to the Tower and he is unwilling to do so. This is a decision that shows the gunslinger’s true character and is extremely important for characterization. McKee states that “[t]rue character is revealed in the choices a human being makes under pressure-the greater the pressure, the deeper the revelation, the truer the choice to the character's essential nature” (101). This decision, not to turn back, is a character defining decision, and the reader instantly knows that Roland, in his core, is driven only by the need to see his mission through. All of these examples clearly show Roland’s psychopathic tendencies.
Roland also shows strong signs of Machiavellianism. This is the third symptom of the Dark Triad and explained by Jonason et al. to be “characterized by a manipulative, self-serving social strategy with three main components: cynicism, manipulativeness, and a view that the ends justify the means” (195). Again, Roland is willing to do whatever it takes to reach the Tower. He believes that in order to do so, nothing he does is unjustifiable. This can clearly be seen in both *Gunslinger* and *Drawing*, where he is willing to sacrifice whomever it takes to be able to reach his goal, be it the innocent people of Tull or a boy whom he could easily have grown to love. Furthermore, in *Wizard and Glass* we get a glimpse into Roland’s youth, his first love and the beginning of his obsession with the Tower. Right from the first moments of his enthralment with the Tower, when he has gazed into the grapefruit and seen what his destiny must be, he is willing to sacrifice everything. This goes as far as not coming to the aid of his one true love and their unborn child as she was burnt to death at the Charyou tree and, as observed by Webb, he “likewise abandoned his first ka-tet, and in doing so lost the ‘Horn of Eld’—a part of his family legacy that at first seems to have little importance to the story, but later turns out to be a vital and missing piece of Roland’s ultimate salvation” (hillaryswebb.com). Furthermore, Roland’s manipulativeness can be seen when he has just drawn Eddie Dean into Mid-World and uses his state of grief for his brother and his withdrawal from heroin to get Eddie to join him on his quest for the Tower, even though this would surely mean Eddie’s death. All these examples of Roland’s behavior and characteristics fall under the categorization of Machiavellianism.

The ending of the *Dark Tower* series tells us that in order to ever truly complete his journey, Roland must change his behavior. Roland reaches the Tower, enters it, and is propelled back to the beginning of *Gunslinger* to repeat his journey. This he has done countless times before. Vincent quotes from *Gunslinger* and states:

“Do you believe in the afterlife?” he asks Brown. “I think this is it,” the young man replies. It’s a perceptive comment, because Roland has probably visited Brown countless times before, having returned to the desert after reaching the end of his life. There is no clearing at the end of the path for him, but he is reborn via the Dark Tower, the Hall of Resumption. (Vincent 31)

Roland is of course oblivious to this repetition and the fact that he seems to be stuck in perpetual limbo, his very own purgatory, doomed to repeat his journey from the beginning of *Gunslinger* until he enters the room at the top of the Tower. No one knows how often he has repeated this
journey, how often he has murdered everyone in Tull, let Jake fall, drawn his three and ventured through all of what he had to go through to reach the Tower only to begin the journey all over again. When Roland and Walter sit down in the Golgotha to palaver, Walter hints that he knows about Roland’s repetitions. He draws tarot cards and predicts the people Roland will draw to his quest. He also draws two cards specifically for Roland, one representing life and the other death, though he follows the drawing of each with the same phrase “but not for you gunslinger” (King, The Gunslinger, 214). This might signify the way the gunslinger will never live out his normal course of days unless he solves the great puzzle of his life. Vincent thinks that “[l]ike the missing horn of Eld, it may be an indication that Roland’s personal quest will fail this time” (44). Later, Walter tells Roland that his story will be the longest one ever told. This is a clear indication that he knows about the cycle though he might not know how often it has been repeated. Regardless of how often Roland has repeated the cycle, or how often he might have to do it again, the pertinent question is whether he can redeem himself and thus break the cycle and truly end his quest, an idea also expressed by Vincent (191). As a result, to escape this form of purgatory that Roland’s life has become, it seems logical that he must change his ways and in fact become more heroic.

3c Roland the Hero

There are quite a few indications in the series that point to Roland’s change in character. Throughout the novels, Roland continues to show signs of the traits of the Dark Triad, though they become less evident as the series progresses. He begins to show signs that he may yet break the cycle of repetition. Roland begins to trust, value and even love the people he draws to his quest, and he likes to think that he would not sacrifice them to get closer to his destination. He has promised himself that he will not, for any reason, lose Jake again, even though it might mean forsaking the Tower. Even though Roland is propelled back to the beginning of Gunslinger at the end of the series, there is one significant difference between the beginning and the end. At the end of The Dark Tower, it says: “Roland touched the horn again, and its reality was oddly comforting, as if he had never touched it before” (King 672). The horn in question is the Horn of Eld, originally owned by Arthur Eld and passed down for generations until it came into Roland’s possession. The horn is also mentioned in the last stanza of Browning’s poem: “Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set/And blew. ‘Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came’”. Since King’s narrative is adapted from Browning’s poem, it stands to reason that the presence of the horn in Roland’s newest repetition of the cycle will be redemptive. Perhaps Roland has learned enough from his ka-tet this time around not to let Jake
fall to his death. Webb believes Jake’s fall is the deciding factor in Roland’s damnation and that he, on some level, is aware of its severe consequences:

Even that early on in his journey and in the series, Roland recognizes that, by letting Jake fall, he has, on some level, chosen damnation over salvation. And yet in that moment, nothing is more important to him than reaching the Tower—not the lives of others; not even the fate of his own soul. Because of this decision, nothing the gunslinger does in the rest of the series—no act of atonement or purgation of sin—can change the final outcome of his journey. (www.hillaryswebb.com)

Perhaps, this time around, he will have changed enough to be the kind of person who would never sacrifice a loved one to reach his goal. Roland will never become a hero in the Byronic sense of the word, but he should be capable of becoming more human. This might be the choice he has to make to stand at the foot of the Tower and blow into the Horn of Eld.

As the series progresses, Roland does show more truly heroic qualities. In taking on the role as a mentor and a teacher, he too gains a lot of knowledge. Vogler states that as a hero proceeds throughout his journey, he gathers and incorporates wisdom and energy from his companions, making himself into a complete human being (25). This is what happens when Roland allows himself to care for his apprentice gunslingers. They teach him love and empathy and he becomes more than he was at the beginning of his journey. Roland is given a second chance to become a father to Jake and he uses this chance to the fullest, developing genuine feelings of fatherly love and truly bonding with him. Furthermore, the bond between Eddie and Susannah gives Roland a deeper understanding and appreciation for how precious true love really is. In addition to this, he is finally able to understand the significance of being able to share your life with another human being. Contrasted with Roland’s previous solitude, this is a very significant realization. These fledgling understandings and qualities are what will, eventually, mold Roland into a true hero.

Furthermore, as the story develops, there are some critical changes to Roland’s character that suggest that this cycle might be the last one. Firstly, in *Gunslinger* Roland contemplates which is more important; friends or his guns. He concludes that there is nothing on earth more important than guns. However, nearing the end of *The Dark Tower*, when Susannah decides to leave him, he begs her to stay. When he sees that begging will not persuade her, he gives her one of his guns to take with her, so it seems that now the safety of a friend has overridden the importance of his guns. Similarly, when he and Jake are trying to save
Stephen King from being run over by a car, both of them get the sense that the other is going to die. Roland makes a promise to himself that he will sacrifice himself to save Jake. Even though he is not able to keep that promise, he tries his best. This is not the same person who has previously let the boy fall without so much as a hesitation. As Vogler states: “A Hero is someone who is willing to sacrifice his own needs on behalf of others, like a shepherd who will sacrifice to protect and serve his flock. At the root the idea of Hero is connected with self-sacrifice” (29). From the example above, it is clear that from the time the reader is first introduced to Roland in Gunslinger until the end of The Dark Tower, Roland has changed so much that he is willing to forsake himself, and his quest, to save the people he loves.
4 Roland’s Heroic Journey

Though *The Dark Tower* series does follow the outline of the Monomyth in many ways, it also deviates from it. Firstly, Roland himself takes on various roles throughout the story. Not only is he the main protagonist, he is also a Herald of Change and a Mentor to his apprentice gunslingers. This deviates from most common narratives of the Hero’s Journey since they tend to portray a single hero who is drawn to the adventure by a Herald and then taught the ways of the new world by a Mentor. However, more adhering to the Monomyth, he is also the character who undergoes the most drastic change in personality and personal growth. Secondly, in the first two books he is alone and it is obvious that he is a maladapted, single minded, murderous character with only a single goal in mind. Given this, his character development is greater than that of the other main characters of the series, even though all of them undergo a journey of vast personal growth and change. In the following sections, each of the stages of the Hero’s Journey will be compared to Roland’s journey, beginning with the Call to Adventure.

4a Ordinary World and Call to Adventure

The Call to Adventure or the departure from the ordinary world is where *The Dark Tower* series, as well as Roland himself, first deviate from the Hero’s Journey. Other narratives that adhere more typically to the Monomyth begin by showing their protagonist living in the ordinary world before they are called to their adventure. Vogler explains that this is because:

> so many stories are journeys that take heroes and audiences to Special Worlds, most begin by establishing an Ordinary World as a baseline for comparison. The Special World of the story is only special if we can see it in contrast to a mundane world of everyday affairs from which the hero issues forth. The Ordinary World is the context, home base, and background of the hero. (Vogler 87)

In a complete contradiction to this, the first novel, *Gunslinger*, begins in *medias res*. Instead of beginning in a mundane everyday world, the reader is thrust into Roland’s world, where he is in an active chase of the man in black. This first instalment of the series was not designed to establish a baseline for comparing the Ordinary World to the fantasy world, but rather to establish a clear characterization for Roland. In many ways, *Gunslinger* offers a vastly different version of Roland than the one portrayed in *The Dark Tower*, the last instalment of the series. This is the book where he murders everyone in Tull, as well as where he lets Jake fall to his death. He clearly shows his murderous nature and his willingness to sacrifice everything for the sake of his quest and the Dark Triad of his personality is at its peak. There is no doubt that
Roland is not the every-day knight in shining armor; rather, he is severely flawed and has a very long way to go if he is to become any kind of hero. Therefore, it can be said that the call to adventure in its more formulaic form does not take place until *Drawing*, the second book of the series.

To begin with, Roland literally draws Eddie to his adventure and, in doing so, saves him from a life of crime and drug abuse. In the beginning of *Drawing*, Roland enters the door marked THE PRISONER. The prisoner is Eddie Dean and his prison is his addiction to heroin. At the point of Roland’s entry into his mind, Eddie has reached rock bottom. He has become involved with extremely dangerous drug lords and is in the middle of committing a federal crime. Eddie might not be able to admit this to himself, but he needs someone to interfere with his life and save him from himself. Eddie is the perfect example of a hero being called to adventure by forces beyond his control. Campbell says that this first stage of the adventure signifies that:

> destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual centre of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown […] it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight. The hero can go forth of his own volition to accomplish the adventure […] or he may be carried or sent abroad by some benign or malignant agent. (53)

After a series of traumatic events, Roland draws Eddie back through the door and to his world. When they enter Roland’s world, the door vanishes. Thus, Roland has, forcefully, issued Eddie’s call to adventure. Eddie gets a harsh introduction to his new environment, which consists of a seemingly endless beach filled with monsters, the lobstrosities that bit off Roland’s fingers. Hence, in addition to suffering withdrawal symptoms and grieving the loss of his brother, he is in constant danger. To make matters worse, Roland is the only person who could possibly help him navigate this new place. However, he is delirious and appears to be dying from an infection due to the wounds he suffered when bitten. These facts force Eddie to accept his drastic change of life and take on the responsibilities of caring for Roland while he recovers and navigating them to the next door. Even though Eddie is now taking care of Roland, it is clear that if Roland had not been Eddie’s herald of change, he would have succumbed to his drug use and life of crime.
Similarly, the second person Roland draws to the adventure is also in need of his help. She is found behind a door marked THE LADY OF SHADOWS, signifying that within her reside two different personalities, both in their own way incomplete and hidden from each other within the shadows of the mind. These personalities are Detta and Odetta, two complete opposites who live in constant contradiction with each other without ever realizing it. While Odetta is an extremely kind and sympathetic character, she lacks confidence and the self-assurance to be able to take control of her own life. In contrast to this, Detta is sadistic, manipulative, conniving, cruel and hurtful, and she takes joy in inflicting pain on other people. Both of these personalities possess qualities that could prove useful to the quest but if they remain separate, they are unable to apply those qualities. Additionally, should these two opposite personalities continue to reside in one body, it will self-destruct. To find balance and to change from being two separate static characters to becoming one dynamic character, they need Roland’s help to bring them together and merge them into one cohesive personality. Thus, just like Eddie, Susannah needs Roland’s help if she is ever going to be able to be the person she was meant to be.

In a way, Eddie, Susannah, and Roland all adhere to Vogler’s Heralds of Change. Susannah and Eddie need Roland’s help to overcome addiction and a divided personality, but Roland is also in dire need of their help and is equally unaware of this need. Vogler states that:

> Often heroes are unaware there is anything wrong with their Ordinary World and don’t see any need for change. They may be in a state of denial. They have been just barely getting by, using an arsenal of crutches, addictions, and defense mechanisms. The job of the Herald is to kick away these supports, announcing that the world of the hero is unstable and must be put back into healthy balance by action, by taking risks, by undertaking the adventure. (101)

By drawing them into his world and, in a way, forcing them to partake in his quest for the Tower, Roland has taken on the role of the Herald whilst Eddie and Susannah are the heroes. Both have been living lives of deceit; Eddie was lying to himself about the severity of his addiction, as was Susannah about her own mental state. Both are in dire need of an intervention from an outside force to steer the course of their lives differently. However, it can also be stated that Eddie and Susannah are Roland’s Heralds of Change. He needs them for his own personal growth, to learn empathy and love for something other than his quest. It is not until these people
enter his life that Roland begins to take the life-altering steps needed for him to transform from antihero to hero.

4b Refusal of the Call

The Refusal of the Call is an important part of the Hero’s Journey. A hero must be aware of the dangers involved within his quest and so must the reader. Before coming to terms with how drastically his life has changed, and dedicating himself to the quest, Eddie tries desperately to return to his old life. Nonetheless, it cannot be said that Roland does not inform Eddie of the dangers he will face, as in Drawing he tells him: “I want you to join me on a quest. Of course, all will probably end in death – death for the four of us in a strange place” (King 152). At that point, faced with the wrath of mobsters and impending imprisonment, Eddie’s survival instincts are what move him to enter Roland’s world. When he realizes that Roland’s world is in fact much more dangerous than his own, it is too late for him to go back. All of this serves the purpose of informing the reader of the severity of the hero’s quest. Vogler states that:

This halt on the road before the journey has really started serves an important dramatic function of signaling the audience that the adventure is risky. It’s not a frivolous undertaking but a danger-filled, high-stakes gamble in which the hero might lose fortune or life […] the hero, after this period of hesitation or refusal, is willing to stake her life against the possibility of winning the goal. (107-108)

Here the series is in keeping with Campbell and Vogler’s theories concerning the stages of the Journey. Even though Roland’s companions are the ones who refuse the call to adventure rather than Roland himself, the call has nonetheless been refused.

Therefore, the Refusal of the Call is another stage in Vogler’s analysis that applies to Eddie and Susannah. It does not apply to Roland though, as it never occurred to him to refuse his call to the Tower even though he knew from the beginning that the road would be arduous, and death was far more likely than success. Roland has a one-track mind and believes that nothing in existence is more important than saving the Tower. Eddie and Susannah, on the other hand, have not had an opportunity to reach this same conclusion. To begin with, they are both driven, not by the need to save the Tower, but rather by the need to save themselves. Campbell states that “[t]he myths and folk tales of the whole world make clear that the refusal is essentially a refusal to give up what one takes to be one’s own interest” (54). Therefore, when Eddie has forcefully been made a part of Roland’s quest, he seeks every opportunity to get back to the Ordinary World where he perceives his interests lie. He has no intention of
staying by Roland’s side and of participating in his quest. At one point he even threatens the gunslinger with his own gun. Similarly, Detta applies her craftiness to capture Eddie and steal one of Roland’s guns. Her intention is to kill them both, to enter the door and get back to the Ordinary World, thus also refusing the call. Therefore, both Eddie and Susannah refuse Roland’s call to adventure, though Roland himself never balks from its calling.

4c Meeting of the Mentor

In another deviation from the structure, Roland is the one who takes on the role of Mentor for his companions. When Eddie and Susannah have accepted their new lot in life, and fallen in love, they are completely dependent upon Roland and his skills and knowledge of this unknown world. In the foreword to Wolves, King states “[b]y now Eddie and Susannah are no longer prisoners in Roland’s world. In love and well on the way to becoming gunslingers themselves, they are full participants in the quest and follow Roland, the last seppe-say (death-seller), along the Path of Shardik, the Way of Maturin” (iii). In Waste Lands they prepare for the arduous journey ahead by becoming apprentice gunslingers under Roland’s guidance. Furthermore, Vogler extrapolates that “[i]n mythology and folklore […] preparation might be done with the help of the wise, protective figure of the Mentor, whose many services to the hero include protecting, guiding, teaching, testing, training, and providing magical gifts” (117). However, Roland’s mentorship is not limited to teaching them how to wield a gun. In their former lives, both Eddie and Susannah were social outcasts; they were not seen as valid citizens but merely perceived as a useless addict and a crippled woman of color, and as such they constituted the undesirables of their own society. Subsequently, they lack both self-confidence and a feeling of self-worth, they do not see themselves as worthy or able to partake in Roland’s grand quest. Ironically, it is Roland, the antihero, who forces them to delve into their own psyche and acknowledge that they possess the ability to be so much more than what their own perception and society have allowed. Without his guidance, they would surely be lost in this unfamiliar and dangerous place since they lack the inner strength to fend for themselves. This is how he helps Eddie and Susannah realize their own potential as gunslingers.

Furthermore, when they finally manage to bring Jake back into the world, Roland becomes both his Mentor and father figure. Since this is not Jake’s first time in Mid-World, he does not refuse the call to adventure but seeks it out willingly in order to end the paradox he has been living in. Since Roland opened the third door on the beach, marked THE PUSHER, and prevented Jake from being drawn into Mid-World in the first place, both he and Roland suffer a form of duality, which is defined by Ericson as “two conceptually distinctive ideas that
are interrelated (10). So, if Roland prevented Jake from being brought to Mid-World in the first place, they could not have met before and subsequently Jake could not have fallen to his death in the mountains beyond the desert. This paradox is slowly driving both Jake and Roland insane for they are living both versions of the story at the same time. That is why Roland’s mind is plaguing him and he lives in constant opposition to his own thoughts, as shown in his reflections where he simultaneously thinks “there was a boy […] there wasn’t a boy” (King, *The Waste Lands* 35). Similarly, Jake struggles with the conviction that he is somehow both alive and dead. Thus, it is a relief to both when Roland brings Jake to Mid-World again, since then they can confirm the reality of the other and Roland can mentor his ka-tet as a whole.

Though Roland slips easily into the role of Mentor, he has not been without a Mentor himself. As stated before, the story begins in *medias res* and hence we are not told of Roland’s origin as a gunslinger until later. He was in fact the youngest ever to receive his guns in a bloody and grueling test of manhood. His education was administered by his mentor, Cort, an old gunslinger whose job it was to teach apprentice gunslingers the way of the gun. He is what Vogler describes as a “heroic figure in a previous story, and as such possesses the experience and wisdom sought by the reluctant hero in the current story” (61). Roland might not ever have been reluctant, but he was in need of a mentor all the same. The teachings of Cort were not only limited to shooting, he also taught Roland everything he needed to know about surviving the harsh realities of their world. Furthermore, he is the one who, after the test of manhood, hands Roland his first guns, and gives him valuable advice regarding the man in black. Since Cort was such an instrumental part of Roland’s youth, it can be stated that he has a much larger part in shaping the character of Roland than his parents ever did. Administering strict lessons and harsh punishment, he is in part responsible for Roland’s coldness and lack of empathy. Roland has dedicated his whole life to the way of the gun and the gunslinger’s oath, which he has relied upon in his search for the Tower, and this is the knowledge he then passes on to Eddie, Susannah and Jake.

Furthermore, all gunslingers live by the gunslinger’s oath. According to Vogler “Mentors spring up in amazing variety and frequency because they are so useful to storytellers. They reflect the reality that we all must learn the lessons of life from someone or something. Whether embodied as a person, a tradition, or a code of ethics” (123). Clearly, Mentors are not limited to actual characters; they can also, as stated by Vogler, take on another form. Some Mentors are even depicted as natural phenomena such as landscape or a change in the weather. The role of Mentor works for anything that teaches the hero valuable lessons and has influence
on the course of their journey. The gunslingers’ oath has been around for centuries and was originally taught to Roland by Cort. In a way, being a gunslinger is like being a part of a religion, since a gunslinger has to act and behave in a certain preordained manner, and he/she seeks comfort, strength and guidance from the gunslingers’ oath: “I do not shoot with my hand […] he who shoots with his hand has forgotten the face of his father; I shoot with my mind […] I do not aim with my hand; he who aims with his hand has forgotten the face of his father. I aim with my eye […] I do not kill with my gun; he who kills with his gun has forgotten the face of his father […] I kill with my heart” (King, *The Waste Lands* 104-105). As a part of his role as mentor, Roland holds to the time-honored tradition of teaching his apprentice gunslingers to live by the teachings of this oath. Furthermore, this oath is more than just inspirational words. They are important life lessons and the heroes of the story live and die by this code to the extent that it has become a part of their rhetoric. Thus, it is not uncommon for one of the heroes to say “I have not forgotten the face of my father”, meaning that they know their path and are doing all in their power to keep to it. Similarly, they might say “cry your pardon, I have forgotten the face of my father”, should they have steered from the true nature of their quest. Like the Lord’s Prayer for Christians, this simple oath reminds the gunslingers of their promise to live by the way of the gun and to keep on the path to the Tower. Therefore, the oath can also be viewed as a Mentor.

The gunslinger’s oath is not the only Mentor in the series that is not actually a person. When the whole group has been assembled and they are truly ready to begin their quest for the Tower in earnest, they can open their eyes to the path of the beam. This is another entity that serves as a guide to the Tower itself. The Dark Tower is held in place by six beams of power; these beams cross each other at the center and there stands the Dark Tower. Furthermore, each beam has a portal at both ends leading to other worlds; these are protected by animal guardians and thus each beam bears the name of its guardians: bat and hare, dog and horse, wolf and elephant etc. The group find themselves at the path of the bear and turtle beam where they are aided by nature itself in the form of subtle changes in the landscape, as can be seen in this excerpt from *Waste Lands*:

“It’s like a riverbed,” Susannah marveled. “A riverbed so overgrown you can barely see it… but it’s still there. The pattern of shadows will never change as long as we stay inside the path of the beam will it?”

“No” Roland said. “They’ll change direction as the sun moves across the sky, of course, but we’ll always be able to see the course of the Beam […] look up, you two,
into the sky!"
They did, and saw that the thin cirrus clouds had also picked up that herringbone
pattern along the course of the Beam…and those clouds within the alley of its power
were flowing faster than those to either side. They were being pushed southeast.
Being pushed in the direction of the Dark Tower. (King 82)

Here, nature has clearly become a Mentor and is showing them the way to the Tower. This
phenomenon can only be seen by those who are true of heart and ready to take on the arduous
journey towards the Tower. This shows that Eddie, Susannah and Jake are serious in their
dedication towards becoming gunslingers and Roland is a true Mentor to them. Now the Tower
itself and the beams supporting it have seen their quest as a true one and are rendering their
own form of mentorship.

In addition to this, the ka-tet receives mentorship from other individuals in small but
significant ways. After Jake has finally rejoined the group in Waste Lands they find themselves
at the last little village just before the town of Lud. There they meet aunt Talitha who “hobbled
towards Roland’s party on her cane […] her toothless mouth was tucked deeply into itself, the
hem of the old shawl she wore fluttered in the prairie breeze” (King 231). Here we have a
typical manifestation of the mentor as a wise old woman who in some minor way aids the
heroes on their journey. When they leave the little town, Talitha has given them crucial
information, as well as bestowing a gift upon Roland. This gift is a cross hanging on a silver
chain, an important medallion that will play a significant part in the story later on. Vogler
explains that:

Giving gifts is also an important function of this archetype. In Vladimir Propp’s analysis
of Russian fairy tales, Morphology of the Folktale, he identifies this function as that of
a “donor” or provider: one who temporarily aids the hero, usually by giving some gift.
It may be a magic weapon, an important key or clue, some magical medicine or food,
or a life-saving piece of advice. (41)

Furthermore, Ted Brautigan’s aid is also a form of mentorship. When the ka-tet arrives at
Algul-Siento, he, along with Dinky Earnshaw and Sheemie, provide them with food and
shelter, as well as vital information pertaining to the destruction of the Devar-Toi. In addition,
Sheemie uses his exceptional telepathic abilities to gather more information to aid the group.
Clearly, therefore, the ka-tet benefits from multiple Mentors throughout their journey towards
the Tower.
**4d Crossing the first Threshold and Threshold Guardians**

Crossing the threshold is when the hero has decided to commit to the journey and takes that metaphorical step across the threshold of the adventure. As stated in the Refusal of the Call, the hero is often reluctant to embark on this unknown journey and must be persuaded to dedicate himself to the quest. Even though Roland may feel as though he is giving him a choice, Eddie is not really given a chance to make up his mind on crossing the threshold nor does he fully understand the immensity of his decision. Regarding how heroes come to partake in the adventure, Vincent states: “[t]he hero may run out of options or discover that a difficult choice must be made. Some heroes are ‘shanghaied’ into the adventure or pushed over the brink, with no choice but to commit to the journey” (128). Eddie has certainly run out of options and consequently, for all intents and purposes, he is thrust unwillingly into the other world by Roland. Even though Eddie may be drawn to the journey against his will, the decision to commit to it is all his. His resistance to the call is quite strong but after Susannah has joined them, his feelings for her mark his turning point. As Vogler maintains, “[o]ften their final commitment is brought about through some external force which changes the course or intensity of the story” (128). What helps Eddie accept his drastically altered life is his love for Susannah. Not only do they come from another world, but also separate time periods - he from 1987 and she from 1964. Thus, should they succeed in Crossing the Threshold again, and return home, they would not be able to carry on with their relationship. Since Susannah has the same feelings for Eddie, they both accept their journey and Cross the Threshold together.

For Jake, the decision to risk everything in order to rejoin the gunslinger is an easy one. The paradox he is now living is driving him insane and he knows the only way to resolve this issue is to rejoin Roland on his quest. Eddie, Susannah and Jake must have faith that their decision to stay is the right one. Just as Eddie and Susannah have faith in their love, so must Jake have faith that the paradox will be resolved by Crossing the Threshold. However, given Roland’s previous betrayal of Jake, this truly is a leap of faith. As Vogler explains, “[t]he Crossing takes a certain kind of courage from the hero […] that special courage is called making the leap of faith. Like jumping out of an airplane, the act is irrevocable. There's no turning back now. The leap is made on faith, the trust that somehow we’ll land safely” (130). Another member who takes a leap of faith and, thus Crosses the Threshold, is Oy. The Billy-bumbler has become an outcast from his own society and should as such be predisposed not to trust strangers. However, when he crosses paths with the ka-tet, he shows both courage and faith when he accepts food and shelter from Jake and immediately becomes a part of their group,
which later proves to have an instrumental part in the quest for the Tower. The Crossing of the Threshold marks the transition from Act I to Act II; Vogler explains this and says that “[t]he First Threshold is the turning point at which the adventure begins in earnest, at the end of Act One” (131). In mythological stories where there is a Threshold, there will also be a Threshold Guardian. Thus, the Crossing of the Threshold is often coupled with a heroic feat from the protagonist.

The story of the Dark Tower is littered with Threshold Guardians. According to Vogler, “[a]t each gateway to a new world there are powerful guardians at the threshold, placed to keep the unworthy from entering” (49). In the case of Jake’s re-entry into Mid-World in Waste Lands this is literally the case. To get back and solve the paradox that is driving both him and Roland insane, he must enter an abandoned decrepit house in Brooklyn, New York. The house is filled with all manner of horrible things, though by far the most horrible is the fact that the house itself is a Guardian. When Jake tries to enter through the door that Roland, Eddie and Susannah have made on the other side, the house takes the form of a monster that tries to bar Jake from entering the world on the other side:

The doorkeeper was not just in the house, it was the house: every board, every shingle, every windowsill, every eave. And now it was pushing forward, becoming some crazily jumbled representation of its true shape as it did. It meant to catch him before he could use the key. Beyond the giant white head and the crooked, hulking shoulder, he could see boards and shingles and wire and bits of glass—even the front door and the broken bannister—flying up the main hall and into the ballroom, joining the form which bulked there, creating more and more of the misshapen plaster-man that was even now groping toward him with its freakish hand. (King 205)

It is essential that Roland be the one to save Jake from the wrath of the Doorkeeper and bring him into the world. Thus, the Guardian serves the dual role of being a literal Threshold Guardian, as well as Roland’s atonement for letting Jake fall. Here he takes on the role of midwife to Jake’s rebirth into Mid-World where Jake “emerged into wet air and slackening hail like babies being born” (King, The Waste Lands 211). Thus, Roland has had a direct hand in both Jake’s death and rebirth. It could also be stated that Balazar and his men take on the role of Threshold Guardians to bar Eddie’s entry into this new world, even though they are, by their actions, the driving force behind Eddie’s rash decision to follow Roland into his world.
These are the more typical Threshold Guardians in *The Dark Tower*, though they do take on various other forms.

Most of the Threshold Guardians portrayed in the series serve the purpose of teaching the protagonists lessons or testing their character. Vogler states that “Threshold Guardians are usually not the main villains or antagonists in stories. Often, they will be lieutenants of the villain, lesser thugs or mercenaries hired to guard access to the chief’s headquarters. They may also be neutral figures who are simply part of the landscape of the Special World” (49). This is the case with Shardik the bear; he is not a villain setting out to thwart the characters’ plans, but simply a part of the Mid-World landscape, designed to guard the portal at the end of the bear-turtle beam and not an actual villain in the heroes’ path. His part in the story is more to introduce the role of the beams, as well as to teach Eddie about his inner courage and the abilities he does not really believe he possesses. This is an important role for the Guardian as Vogler also states that the “[t]esting of the hero is the primary dramatic function of the Threshold Guardian” (49). Similarly, Roland is also put to the test when the Tick-Tock Man kidnaps Jake. This is done to see if Roland has truly changed his ways and if he will put himself and his quest in danger to go after Jake and rescue him, or if he is willing to sacrifice him again. Even so, this is not the only role of the Tick-Tock Man, since Vogler explains that “[t]here is often a symbiotic relationship between a villain and a Threshold Guardian […] villains of stories often rely on underlings such as doorkeepers, bouncers, bodyguards, sentries, gunslingers, or mercenaries to protect and warn them when a hero approaches the Threshold of the villain’s stronghold” (49-50). Randall Flagg enlists Tick-Tock as his foot soldier, someone he can utilize to help him get rid of the gunslinger and his ka-tet. This is similar to the role of Andy the messenger robot, a Threshold Guardian, who spies on the people of Calla Bryn Sturgis to deliver information to the sentries of the Crimson King. Thus, the Threshold Guardians of *The Dark Tower* are either present for character and plot development or as informants and assistants to the series’ villains.

Additionally, another, more old-fashioned, version of a Threshold Guardian appears in the series in the form of Blaine the Mono. Blaine is a sentient monorail that runs from Mid-World to End-World. On this specific type of Threshold Guardians, Vogler maintains that “[w]hen heroes confront one of these figures, they must solve a puzzle or pass a test. Like the Sphinx who presents Oedipus with a riddle before he can continue his journey, Threshold Guardians challenge and test heroes on the path” (50). Blaine takes on this role by putting the
heroes to the test in a game of riddles. This part of the story does indeed bear striking similarities to that of Oedipus’ confrontation with the Sphynx. Hecimovich points out that:

When contestants fail to solve the puzzle, she literalizes the confusion of categories: she incorporates the human into the animal by eating her audience. Oedipus disarms the Sphynx by re-arranging the categories confused in the puzzle […] in successfully sorting out the riddle, Oedipus is given license to “go free” – i.e., not be killed and consumed. Because she exists solely as an embodiment of the riddle she tells, the Sphynx dies of embarrassment. Oedipus undoes the puzzle and the Sphynx. (3)

The confrontation with Blaine is in fact a reversal of the Oedipus story since it is not the Guardian that asks the riddles but the ka-tet. After having exhausted their arsenal of what could be called regular or normal riddles, it is Eddie who manages to stump Blaine with riddles that Roland had previously deemed unworthy, for they were naught but silly children’s jokes. Obviously, Blaine’s role as a Threshold Guardian is to teach Eddie another lesson in the importance of believing in yourself and trusting your own instincts. Furthermore, the altercation with Blaine also teaches Roland to trust Eddie, even though his methods may sometimes seem senseless. By figuring out Blaine’s weakness, Eddie has proved himself worthy despite his immature sense of humor. Therefore, just like the Sphynx is undone by Oedipus’ correct answer, so is Blaine undone by his inability to answer Eddie’s question. This results in his computers giving out and he crashes, though without causing any harm to the heroes. The Dark Tower contains many such Threshold Guardians for there are many Thresholds that the heroes must cross. Since each book represents its own mini-Monomyth, it must contain Thresholds to cross and Guardians to protect them. There are not many Guardians Roland faces alone, though Sylvia Pittston from Tull is a Guardian left by Randall Flagg to slow Roland down. Similarly, the lobstrosities at the beach are Threshold Guardians trying to prevent Roland from opening the doors on the beach.

4e Tests, Allies, Enemies

As the name suggests, the stage of Tests, Allies and Enemies revolves around the hero who has now come to terms with his new situation and must complete difficult tasks with the aid of Allies, while meeting Enemies along the way. After having Crossed the Threshold the heroes are now ready to begin their quest in earnest and their journey will not be an easy one. Campbell’s descriptions of the challenges ahead sums this up quite well:
Many-headed is this surrounding Hydra; one head cut off, two more appear—unless the right caustic is applied to the mutilated stump. The original departure into the land of trials represented only the beginning of the long and really perilous path of initiator’s conquests and moments of illumination. Dragons have now to be slain and surprising barriers passed—again, again, and again. Meanwhile there will be a multitude of preliminary victories, unretainable ecstasies, and momentary glimpses of the wonderful land. (102)

In other words, this new world is filled with perils and the heroes will be faced with mortal danger multiple times. It is of the utmost importance that the heroes recognize these perils when encountering them and that they accept any aid offered along the way. In addition to this, the tests the heroes are submitted to do not only serve to propel them further in their quest for the Tower, but also in their journey of self-discovery; Batty explains that the “path [the hero] takes is not simple, but laden with obstacles, tests and meetings that force him to consider his actions and the consequences they have upon his learning of inner lessons, and to understand how the journey taken generates a sense of rebirth” (63). Roland’s companions have all gone through their own version of rebirth, and now they are all invested in the quest for saving the Tower. At this stage of the quest, there will be more Threshold Guardians to defeat and they will be tested until important lessons are learned.

At this point, it is important for the members of the group to realize their own strength and skills, so they can fully take on their specific role in the quest. Traditionally, when a group embarks upon a quest, each member will possess different skills designed to aid the group on the journey. Vogler argues that many “stories feature multiple heroes or a hero backed up by a team of characters with special skills or qualities” (139), for when a group works together towards a common goal, every individual member has a specific part to play. However, when the members of that team have not yet realized their own potential, they are bound to encounter obstacles during the journey that enable them to understand and apply this ability. This realization often comes when the hero encounters a Test, and in connection to this, Vogler states that the “[t]ests at the beginning of Act Two are often difficult obstacles, but they don’t have the maximum life-and-death quality of later events […] The Tests may be a continuation of the Mentor’s training. Many Mentors accompany their heroes this far into the adventure, coaching them for the big rounds ahead” (136). During their quest for the Tower, the group is constantly being trained by Roland. He sees every obstacle and every test as an opportunity to hone their skills, building their self-esteem and forging a stronger character. Thus, Roland is
There when each member of his ka-tet tackles a test made to call forth and hone their skills. Even then, the methods Roland uses to motivate his companions and help them in their moments of struggle are often rather unorthodox and may seem unsympathetic. However, even though his methods might seem strange, and often cruel, he is adamant on helping his companions on their journey of self-discovery.

The first of the group to face a test to realize his special abilities is Eddie. One of his skills turns out to be whittling, and Vincent elaborates on the importance of this newly discovered ability and states that “[e]verything serves the Beam; Eddie’s rediscovered hobby will soon become as important a skill as knowing how to shoot” (72). Eddie’s task is a matter of life and death, as he must whittle a key in order to open the door for Jake to aid him in his re-entry into Mid-World. However, Eddie is plagued by insecurities brought on by his brother’s endless taunting, and consequently, he falls into a pit of despair and self-doubt, made worse by the certainty that he will not be able to finish the key. Here, Roland embraces his role as a mentor and comes to Eddie’s aid. At first, he gives him fatherly advice, trying to build Eddie’s confidence. Later, when time is running out for Jake, and Eddie is even more terrified of completing his task, Roland opts for another method, cruelty:

You haven’t finished the key, but not because you are afraid to finish. You’re afraid of finding you can’t finish […] You’re not afraid of the great world, Eddie, but of the small one inside yourself. You haven’t forgotten the face of your father. So do it. Shoot me if you dare. I’m tired of watching you blubber […] you have come from the shadow of the heroin and the shadow of your brother, my friend. Come from the shadow of yourself. If you dare. Come now. Come out or shoot me and have done with it. (King, The Waste Lands 174)

Here, Roland goes as far as commanding Eddie to find his inner strength and finish the key, for his father’s sake. This is what Eddie needs to thrust aside the voice of his brother and it enables him to complete his task. Jake’s rebirth into the new world would not have been possible without Eddie finally being able to shut out his brother’s endless taunts and, instead, embracing his own innate capabilities. His strengths are revealed through this form of trial and he also gains the inner peace and self-assurance he so desperately needed.

Similarly, the other members of the ka-tet all have abilities specific to them that serve to help the group as a whole. Jake has what Roland calls “the touch”, which is the power of foresight and the ability to project his thoughts into other people’s minds and read theirs.
Having abilities does not always please the hero; in *Wolves*, Jake utilizes this gift to his own distaste to monitor Susannah’s mind in order to see if another personality, Mia, has begun developing there, and whether it is gaining too much control. Susannah can be said to have the power of adaptability since she was able to accommodate two separate individuals within her body, until they merged into the person she is now. She can apply the strong parts from each personality and use them to her advantage. She is very quick to learn how to shoot and in *Wolves*, she takes to the Oriza plates (an ancient weapon almost solely used by women, a steel plate with a sharpened edge) as a fish to water. She has also shown that her handicap is not a severe hindrance, since even though a wheelchair is a necessity for her, she can maneuver quite well without one. When Jake is re-entering Mid-World, she must make use of her gender. The speaking ring, where Jake is to re-enter their world, is guarded by a demon, a highly sexual being that happens to appear in male form. Here Susannah’s strength is made obvious; she falls back on Detta Walker who has been known to use sex as a weapon, and in the end, it is she who holds and rapes the demon, not vice versa. The fifth member of the group, Oy the Billy-bumbler, also has special qualities. He is a very smart animal and forms a special and loving relationship with Jake. When the Tick-Tock man kidnaps Jake, Oy takes on the role of a tracking animal and assists Roland in finding him again. Furthermore, Oy saves Jake’s life more than once, in addition to saving Roland’s life at the end of *The Dark Tower*. It is clear that each member of the ka-tet has his or her own set of skills that all prove to be imperative to their quest.

Given the length and scope of the story, and the fact that each installment is its own version of the Monomyth, it contains enemies aplenty. These vary in severity and difficulty, and some of these are discussed in the chapter on Threshold Guardians. Vogler states that “[e]nemies include both the villains or antagonists of stories and their underlings. Enemies may perform functions of other archetypes such as the Shadow, the Trickster, the Threshold Guardian, and sometimes the Herald” (138). Roland, of course, brings his own enemies into the story. By pursuing the Tower, he has made a mortal enemy of the Crimson King and Randall Flagg is his most dangerous underling. Throughout the Series, Flagg often goes to great lengths to enlist various individuals and elements to stand in the way of the ka-tet. He is responsible for Threshold Guardians such as the big coffin hunters, Sylvia Pittston, the Tick-Tock man, and Nort’s reanimated corpse.

The most dangerous enemy Flagg enlists, turns out to be Mordred, Roland’s own son. Mordred is created by the demon that Susannah encounters during Jake’s re-entry into Mid-
world. This demon possesses some of Roland’s sperm and uses it to impregnate Susannah. Given the unusual circumstances involving the conception of the child, it is understandable that the pregnancy is also unusual. Again, Susannah is divided into two separate personalities, those of Susannah and Mia, a name that means mother. Mia is actually the one who carries the baby to term and when she finally gives birth to baby Mordred, he turns out to be a literal monster. He shapeshifts from an adorable baby into a grotesque spider and devours Mia to gain nourishment. Mordred’s origin is another connection to Arthurian legends. Mancoff explains that Mordred is known as either Arthur’s illegitimate son by Arthur and his sister, or as his nephew (240). Furthermore, according to Varin, King Arthur had a dream wherein Mordred was the one who killed him. To prevent his own murder, he estimates when Mordred is supposed to be born and orders all children born on that day to be drowned. However, Mordred does not drown and is returned to his mother and later, fulfills Arthur’s dream (167). This is an intertextual reference to Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* (1485) and creates a tighter connection between Roland and his Arthurian ancestry. Interestingly, it is Mordred who finally kills Randall Flagg, an act best interpreted as patricide - the reason being, that since Flagg was the one who orchestrated the events leading up to Susanna’s pregnancy, he can also be construed as being Mordred’s father. Therefore, this turn of events still reflects, in some ways, the legend of Mordred. Even though Mordred has murdered what can be interpreted as his father, he was born with an innate hatred for Roland, and his greatest mission in life is to see him dead; making him one of Roland’s greatest enemies.

When facing trials, ordeals and enemies it is necessary to have good Allies. According to Vogler “[h]eroes may walk into the Test stage looking for information, but they may walk out with new friends or Allies” (137). This is indeed what happens to the ka-tet in *Wolves* when they meet father Callahan. He is a character who first appears in *Salem’s Lot*, one of the very early King novels. Now he is a pastor in the town of Calla Bryn Sturgis and when the ka-tet arrive in town, he proves an invaluable help to them, so much so that he becomes a temporary part of their ka-tet. In addition, in *Song*, Callahan goes as far as to sacrifice his own life to save Jake’s. The events that took place in *Salem’s Lot* left Callahan in very bad shape, he lost his faith in God and his hold on sobriety and, eventually, he lost himself on the streets of New York. When the ka-tet crosses his path, he finally has an opportunity to redeem himself. He has regained his faith in God but now he is able to regain his faith in himself. He may be one of the ka-tet’s most crucial Allies, but they also turn out to be the road to his salvation. Furthermore, many other people, such as Calvin Towers, Aaron Deepneau, Moses Carver and
John Cullum, all lend their aid to the group by forming the Tet Corporation. The main role of this corporation is to aid the gunslingers to the best of their abilities, as well as to protect the rose in the vacant lot. They also monitor all of Stephen King’s work and have commissioned specialized individuals to read through all his novels to find any connections to the quest. Towards the end of the series, in *The Dark Tower* they also find Allies in Ted Brautigan, Dinky Earnshaw and Sheemie, who help the group prepare for their fight at Alqul Siento by giving them information and a place to stay. These Allies help the heroes enormously and, without their aid, the group might not have succeeded in saving the beams and the Tower.

### 4f The Approach to the Inmost Cave

In the *Dark Tower* series there are several scenarios that can be classified as the Approach to the Inmost Cave. The Approach is the time where the heroes take stock of their armory and make plans for the ultimate battle or the Ordeal that lies ahead. This is when they, according to Vogler, give themselves a moment to recuperate and take “time to make final preparations for the central ordeal of the adventure” (143). Batty goes further and states that “at this moment […] what has thus far been acquired physically and learned emotionally is brought into focus” (65). Now is the time for the group of gunslingers to utilize their lessons and remember the faces of their fathers. For the ka-tet, there are two significant Approaches to the Inmost Cave. The former takes place in *Wolves* when they stay in Calla Bryn Sturgis and prepare to aid the people who live there. By choosing to name the town Calla Bryn Sturgis, King makes a connection to the spaghetti western that inspired the plot in *Wolves*, as Vincent elaborates:

> The town’s name acknowledges the classic Western *The Magnificent Seven* as part of King’s inspiration. In the movie, the people of a small Mexican village hire a gunslinger to protect them from bandits who raid their village for food. They leave only enough so the people can struggle to survive and produce more food for the next raid. The wolves don’t steal food; they steal children, one of every set of twins in a village where single births are the exception. (116)

These events are about to happen again and the ka-tet will try to prevent it. Now, the group must take its time to reorganize and prepare for what is to come. They gather as much information as possible on these wolves and forge relationships with the people of the town. Vogler notes the importance of this stage of preparation, and explains that the heroes “know they are facing a great ordeal, and are wise to make themselves as ready as they’ll ever be, like warriors polishing and sharpening their weapons, or students doing final drills before a big
exam” (146). By giving themselves time to prepare for the battle ahead, they increase the likelihood of being victorious.

Although this is meant to be a moment for the hero to gather strength and organize, he must not let down his guard. A great celebration is held in honor of the ka-tet and the town does everything in its power to make them feel welcome. However, the gunslingers are aware that they cannot trust everyone in town. Vogler mentions that the hero must be aware of who he trusts: “[d]on’t be seduced by illusions and perfumes, stay alert, don’t fall asleep on the march” (145) meaning, they must keep an eye open to any possible betrayals. These betrayals later show up in the form of Andy the Messenger Robot and Ben Slightman Sr. Even though the ka-tet is planning and recuperating in Calla Bryn Sturgis, detrimental events are still unfolding. For the first time, the members of the ka-tet are holding secrets from each other. This sudden loss of trust between them is a very serious breach of loyalty and creates a feeling of unease and loss of unity, a feeling all of them unknowingly share. For the first time since they became a ka-tet, Roland has trouble trusting his companions. Vincent explains Roland’s dilemma: “[h]e can’t trust Susannah because of Mia, nor Eddie because he loves Susannah. Jake might let something slip to Benny Slightman, and Roland is suspicious of Benny’s father” (126). Consequently, Roland feels as though he cannot confide in his ka-tet and decides to keep a very serious secret to himself since, recently, he has been suffering from what he believes is rheumatism, a very serious illness for a gunslinger about to enter into battle and not something he should be hiding from his companions. Therefore, even though the group may be gaining a chance to rest, it is important for them to be vigilant and watch out for betrayals and loss in unity within their own ranks.

Should the ka-tet wish to become a functioning unit again, they must take time to work through the difficulties that now pose a threat to their quest. This corresponds with Vogler’s statement that now the hero, or the group, may experience severe setbacks on their journey:

Heroes may have disheartening setbacks at this stage while approaching the supreme goal. Such reversals of fortune are called dramatic complications. Though they may seem to tear us apart, they are only a further test of our willingness to proceed. They also allow us to put ourselves back together in a more effective form for traveling in this unfamiliar terrain. (149)

In addition to keeping secrets from each other, the ka-tet is broken after Mia takes control of Susannah’s body and flees. It has become necessary for the rest of the group to take a moment
and decide what action to take. As Vogler explains, the “Approach stage is also a time to reorganize a group: to promote some members, sort out living, dead, and wounded, assign special missions, and so on” (150). If they ever wish to become whole again, it is necessary for the group to split up. They must find Susannah, but at the same time they also have to save Stephen King’s life. Callahan goes with Jake to find Susannah and ends up sacrificing himself to save Jake, thereby completing his part of the quest. Despite these setbacks, the ka-tet is able to reorganize and regroup. Since Susannah is now rid of both Mia and Mordred, she has become her own person again and they do not have to keep secrets from each other anymore; they can carry on their way to the Inmost Cave.

The second scenario that can be seen to function as an Approach to the Inmost Cave is the group’s preparation for the attack on Algul Siento. This is a heavily guarded area from which the beams holding the Dark Tower are being destroyed, and it is necessary for the group to attack it if they want to save the Tower. Again, the ka-tet stops to make plans and to be together as a group. Here is where they first experience ka-shume, the feeling of impending death, a certainty that one or all members of the ka-tet will perish in their upcoming battle. This is what Jake feels shortly before he falls to his death in *Gunslinger* (King, *The Dark Tower* 210). Up until now, the gunslingers have been aware of the dangers they face on their journey, but death has never been as tangible as it is now, Vogler explains that “[a]nother function of the Approach stage is to up the stakes and rededicate the team to its mission. The audience may need to be reminded of the ‘ticking clock’ or the ‘time bomb’ of the story. The urgency and life-and-death quality of the issue need to be underscored” (149). This is further emphasized by beamquakes, tremors similar to earthquakes that take place when the beams are close to breaking. Vogler explains that the “Approach encompasses all the final preparations for the Supreme Ordeal. It often brings heroes to a stronghold of the opposition, a defended center where every lesson and Ally of the journey so far comes into play” (152). This fits the attack on Algul Siento; the group knows they are entering into almost certain death. They are as prepared as they will ever be, having taken the time to meticulously plan their attack.

4g Ordeal

The Ordeal is the main crisis of the journey. Again, there are many Ordeals within the *Dark Tower* but the most significant one is the battle at Algul Siento. When it comes to the Ordeal, Vogler states that “[t]he simple secret of the Ordeal is this: Heroes must die so that they can be reborn” (155). This is just what happens at Algul Siento where Eddie is shot in the head and killed. His death marks the beginning of a tragic turn of events for the ka-tet, since soon after,
Jake also dies when he gives his life to save Stephen King and, lastly, Oy sacrifices himself to save Roland from Mordred. Vogler further elaborates on the death of the hero: “Heroes don’t just visit death and come home. They return changed, transformed. No one can go through an experience at the edge of death without being changed in some way” (156). Thus, many heroes are reborn or reach the brink of death, only to be brought back. This is not what befalls Roland’s companions, and the only person to survive the road to the Dark Tower is Susannah, who ends up abandoning the quest. However, even though Eddie, Jake and Oy do lose their lives, they are not completely gone from the multiverse.

In his version of the Hero’s Journey, King takes the concept of rebirth and transformation to another level. Since the Tower’s multiverse has an infinite number of worlds that all mirror each other, a version of Eddie, Jake, Susannah and Oy can be found in every one of them. This explains Jake’s last words before he falls to his death in Gunslinger: “go then, there are other worlds than these” (King 222). Jake remembers that his initial entry into Mid-world was through death. He was pushed in front of a car and when he died, he appeared at the waystation. Thus, Jake is aware of the infinity of the multiverse and realizes that on some level of the Tower, he will still be alive. According to Vogler “[m]ost of the time, [heroes] magically survive this death and are literally or symbolically reborn to reap the consequences of having cheated death. They have passed the main test of being a hero” (156). This applies to the death of Eddie, Jake and even Oy. Having proven themselves, they are granted a happy and fulfilling extension to their lives in another version of themselves. When Susannah finally realizes that it is not her place to complete the journey to the Tower alongside Roland, but rather to aid him on his way, she finds a doorway leading to these versions of her loved ones. The last time Eddie, Susannah, Jake and Oy are mentioned, they have been reintroduced and are forming a new relationship with each other. Now that they have all completed their task of helping Roland on his quest of finding and saving the Tower, they can reap the rewards of all their hard work, dedication and sacrifice.

Furthermore, Vogler maintains that for a viewing audience it is important to play on emotions and the same can be said for readers. Both readers and viewers become emotionally invested in characters, care what happens to them, and feel sadness when they die. Importantly, many readers of the Dark Tower series gradually became invested in the main characters since a long time elapsed between publication of the novels. The readers thus gradually became one of the ka-tet, a part of the group, making the characters’ deaths especially difficult to accept. This kind of connection to fictional characters often elicits deep emotions when these
characters go through personal tragedy. Such as what Roland goes through when Jake is killed whilst saving Stephen King. Roland has developed paternal feelings for Jake and made a promise to himself that he will not let him die again, though, in the end, it is Jake’s decision to sacrifice himself so that King may live to carry on with their story. The death of the boy is very traumatic for Roland and his grief is so deep, it is almost tangible:

The gunslinger gathered the boy up […] and lowered him into the hole. A crumble of dirt spilled down one cheek and Roland wiped it away […] He knelt a moment longer with his hands clasped between his knees, thinking he had not known the true power of sorrow, nor the pain of regret until this moment.

*I cannot bear to let him go.*

But once again, that cruel paradox: if he didn’t, the sacrifice was in vain.

Roland opened his eyes and said, “Goodbye, Jake. I love you, dear.” (King, *The Dark Tower* 385-386)

At this moment, the reader is completely in tune with Roland’s pain, he identifies with his sorrow as well as his regret. Roland is devastated by what he perceives to be his betrayal of Jake. He had made a promise not to let Jake fall again, and now the boy is gone. Jake’s heart-wrenching death, so shortly after Eddie’s, serves to further stir the reader’s emotions. Vogler likens the emotions of viewers to a basketball that is held underwater, the deeper it is held, the higher it will bounce back up. Furthermore, he explains that “[t]he Ordeal is one of the deepest ‘depressions’ in a story and therefore leads to one of its highest peaks” (161). Here, the main arc of *The Dark Tower* does not follow the formula. From the moment of Eddie’s death, the story takes a tragic turn where each member of Roland’s group abandons the quest for the Tower, thus, leaving the reader emotionally raw.

Now Roland must come face to face with his greatest fear. After the painful loss of Eddie and Jake, it is hard for the rest of the ka-tet to move on towards the Tower and there are very few moments that lift the spirit of the reader. This arguably correlates to another statement from Vogler where he says that “[t]he Ordeal can be defined as the moment the hero faces his greatest fear. For most people this is death, but in many stories it’s just whatever the hero is most afraid of” (169). In an ironic turn of events, what Roland is now most afraid of has changed drastically. At the beginning of the series, his greatest fear was to not complete his quest; now, however, it is the looming possibility that he must face the Tower alone. He has, for the first time in decades, formed meaningful relationships with other people and he is
terrified of being left alone. However, everything points to the inevitability that all his companions will perish before reaching the Tower, just as his former ka-tet did. Thus, coming to terms with the fact that he must face the Tower alone, is Roland’s personal crisis, as well as his greatest fear.

4h Atonement with the Father

Even though King’s series has been compared to Vogler’s theories, one of Campbell’s stages, excluded from Vogler, is particularly applicable to The Dark Tower narrative. For Campbell, the Ordeal means more than just the death of the hero and preparation for the reward, and he divides this stage into “Meeting with the Goddess”, “Woman as a Temptress”, “Atonement with the Father” and “Apotheosis”. The stage that correlates with Roland’s journey is the Atonement with the Father. Batty states that “‘Atonement with the Father’ sees the hero meeting and finding atonement with the fatherly figure before he can move on; the Ordeal of union before ‘bliss’ can be reached” (66). Frequently, the Father is God himself or some version of God; he can be terrible or he can be benevolent, but he is all-powerful. Often, the hero is afraid of the Father, for he can be cruel and vengeful. When the hero atones with the father and makes his peace with him, he has reached an important stage of his journey. He no longer needs to be afraid of the father’s anger and he has earned his blessing to carry on with his quest.

During the stage of the Ordeal, the ka-tet learns about Stephen King and the fact that he is the one recruited by Gan to write their story, thus in reality, becoming their father or their creator. More than that, he is also their God. Stephen King is the creator of their universe, he is the one who gave them life, and he is the one who can un-make them. Batty explains this power of the Father: “[h]e is the dominant force who possesses the ability to raise the hero from his past and propel him into his future” (69). This is King’s role within the narrative, as he listens to the song of the turtle and writes what he hears. When Roland and Eddie first encounter him, he has stopped listening to the song and consequently stopped writing the story, and so it becomes Roland’s job to confront him and coerce him to carry on with the tale. When Roland meets King, he comes face to face with his father. Campbell states that “[t]he hero transcends life with its peculiar blind spot and for a moment rises to a glimpse of the source. He beholds the face of the father, understands —and the two are atoned” (124). For the first time, Roland actually sees the face of his father, and it is a face he is not likely to forget since Roland and King are so alike that they could be twins. The second time they meet in The Dark Tower, Jake gives his life to save King’s. In his heart, Roland knows that this is not King’s fault, but he still blames him. Here, King embodies the father and scolds the son, puts him right and steers him
back on course: “Save your hate for those who deserve it more. I didn’t make your ka any more than I made Gan or the world, and we both know it. Put your foolishness behind you – and your grief – and do as you’d have me do […] Finish the job!” (King, The Dark Tower 373). Having completed his atonement with the father he is ready to move on, despite the death of his adopted son.

4i Reward

The Reward or the stage of the seizing of the sword, as defined by Vogler, takes on a different meaning when examined in the context of The Dark Tower. There is no moment of celebration here, no campfire or love scenes, since the two surviving members of the ka-tet must carry on with their journey and their sorrows. Vogler explains that a “hero may be granted a new insight or understanding of a mystery as her Reward. She may see through a deception. If she has been dealing with a shapeshifting partner, she may see through his disguises and perceive the reality for the first time. Seizing the Sword can be a moment of clarity” (181). Here, the shapeshifter is not portrayed as a partner but a person they encounter near the end of their quest who offers them help. This pertains to The Dark Tower where what appears to be a helpful individual called Dandelo, turns out to be a creature that lives off other people’s emotions, a vampire of sorts. This being has lured them into a false sense of security and has almost managed to choke Roland with laughter. Susannah is only able to figure this out because she is given a hint, when she finds a note saying “Relax! Here comes the deus ex machina!” (King, The Dark Tower 551). This is literally the case, since the note was written by Stephen King, the creator of the story, and thus the deus ex machina gives Susannah the moment of clarity she needs to see through the disguise of the shapeshifter. That is her reward for being a part of the ka-tet that saved the Tower from falling, as well as saving King’s own life.

Furthermore, the seizing of the sword differs between stories and heroes. Batty says that “[b]oth Vogler and Campbell write that the Reward/Ultimate Boon should be appropriate to the story and its hero. If the emotional reward is abstract and can be universally applied to any narrative, then the physical reward is specific to the hero and his situation” (72). Roland does, in a way, seize the sword when he saves Patrick Danville, who has been a captive of Dandelo, for the seizing does not necessarily have to encompass a sword; Vogler explains that “a sword is only one of many images for what is being seized by the hero at this step. Campbell’s term for it is ‘The Ultimate Boon’. Another concept is the Holy Grail, an ancient and mysterious symbol for all the unattainable things of the soul that knights and heroes quest after” (179). It turns out that Patrick is as valuable a weapon as any sword. He is a person the
Crimson King went to great lengths to try and destroy; the origin of his story is told in *Insomnia* (1994) one of King’s many books that directly link to *The Dark Tower*. He has been Dandelo’s captive for many years and has nearly lost his mind as well as his tongue. Patrick Danville is the weapon Roland needs to defeat the Crimson King. In the end, Patrick literally erases him from the world, using his pencil and a small eraser, thus, proving himself to be the only weapon Roland could have wielded against his greatest foe.

4j The Road Back

According to Vogler’s theory, the Road Back is where the hero examines his current status and makes a decision regarding the next stage. Thus far, he has faced the Ordeal and seized the sword, his lessons have been learned and now the quest might come to an end. Even though the hero has begun to contemplate his return home, he has yet to reach his ultimate goal. He might have slowed down on the quest or is not feeling as much pressure to see his mission through. At this point, the hero often encounters a surprise attack, a final threshold guardian or another final obstacle to overcome. Furthermore, Vogler states that during the Road Back “[h]eroes gather up what they have learned, gained, stolen, or been granted in the Special World. They set themselves a new goal, to escape, find further adventure, or return home” (193). Now the hero must take stock of what he has learned and gained on the journey so far and decide what to do next.

This stage is yet another example of where *The Dark Tower* deviates from the formula. Roland has no other place to return to, but his companions do. Vogler explains that “once the lessons and Rewards of the great Ordeal have been celebrated and absorbed, heroes face a choice: whether to remain in the Special World or begin the journey home to the Ordinary World” (187). This choice is presented to Susannah in the final chapters of *The Dark Tower*. She has been dreaming of a world where Eddie and Jake await her and soon understands that Patrick Danville can draw her a door that will open into that world. Even though it pains her to leave Roland to complete the quest alone, she knows in her heart that she must. She has fulfilled her part of the journey, and if she stays with Roland, she will perish. Vogler continues by stating that “[a]lthough the Special World may have its charms, few heroes elect to stay. Most take The Road Back, returning to the starting point or continuing on the journey to a totally new locale or ultimate destination” (187). Since the deaths of Eddie and Jake, this world holds no charm for Susannah and now that she has an opportunity to see them again, there is nothing that can keep her on the road, not even Roland’s pleading:
“Susannah, don’t. I beg you, don’t go. I’ll get on my knees, if that will help.” And to
her horror, he began to do exactly that […] He got up and came to her. For a moment
she thought he meant to restrain her by force, and she was afraid. But he only put his
hand on her arm for a moment, and then took it away. “Let me ask you again,
Susannah. Are you sure?” She coned her heart and saw that she was. (King, The Dark
Tower 606)

Susannah has undergone tremendous changes on her journey and is far from being the same
woman who set out to find the Tower. She has been transformed from two women into one and
has taken on an emotional journey where she has fallen in love in more than one way. Now she
can go back and enjoy her new life with her husband and friend.

The stage of the Road Back can also contain an attack from a monster. Now, except for
the feebleminded Danville and Oy, Roland finds himself alone again. Vogler maintains that at
this point the “ogre or villain that the hero confronted in the Ordeal may pull himself together
and strike a counterblow” (190). This part is played by Mordred. He has been following Roland
since he left Algul Siento. Sick and on the verge of death, the only thing that drives Mordred
on is the thought of murdering Roland. Given Roland’s understandably grief-stricken mind,
Mordred might have succeeded if Oy had not been there to protect Roland. Now it is Oy who
sacrifices his life to save Roland’s. It seems as though Roland’s road to the Tower is destined
to be strewn with the bodies of the ones he holds dear. For Roland, this is an echo from his
youth since he also lost his first ka-tet on the way to the Tower. The Road Back does not apply
to Roland since when he reaches the Tower and enters it, he is always thrust backwards to the
beginning of the story, doomed to repeat it until the time he does not sacrifice Jake for the
Tower. There is no moment of triumph or even a completion of his quest and there will be none
until he has made these necessary changes.

4k Resurrection

In a traditional myth or film, the Resurrection is when the hero must undergo the final stages
of change to be able to re-enter the ordinary world. When it comes to Roland, the whole purpose
of his quest is for him to undergo the changes necessary to finally be able to complete his
journey. Thus, in a sense, his whole quest is a form of Resurrection. How far Roland has
actually come on his journey towards self-betterment is unclear. The reader is only given
insight into one of the many trips Roland has taken to the Tower, and it is unclear how often
he has gone on this same journey. What is made obvious is that this time around Roland’s
character undergoes enough change for it to affect the next cycle of the journey. According to Vogler, “[t]he trick for writers is to show the change in their characters, by behavior or appearance rather than by just talking about it. Writers must find ways to demonstrate that their heroes have been through a Resurrection” (197). King does this in the last paragraph of *The Dark Tower*. Now the reader sees Roland back at the beginning of his quest, chasing the man in black across the desert. Nevertheless, there is a difference since this time he is holding the Horn of Eld, so a change has taken place:

the herald of change comes from outside his closed loop. That he now has Eld’s horn means that his personal evolution somehow extended its tentacles back into time and made him a slightly different person. Is this a gift from ka, a deus ex machina reward for the lessons he learned with his ka-tet? Perhaps Roland hasn’t truly looped back to a place in his past but has elevated to a different level of the Tower, a version of reality where he made different—hopefully better—decisions along the way, improving his chance of success. (Vincent 190)

Therefore, while *The Dark Tower* series in many ways adheres to the stages of the Hero’s Journey, it seems as though Roland’s journey as a whole can also be seen as a form of his own Resurrection.

What Roland must do, should he ever wish to complete his quest, is to make different choices. Choice is important within Vogler’s scheme: “difficult choice tests a hero’s values: Will he choose in accordance with his old, flawed ways, or will the choice reflect the new person he’s become?” (201). Roland’s possession of the horn suggests that he has finally undergone the changes he needs to make different choices this time around. In the afterword to *The Dark Tower*, King explains that he “hope[s] the reader will see that by discovering the Horn of Eld the gunslinger may finally be on the way to his own resolution. Possibly even to redemption” (686). Up to this point, all of Roland’s multiple quests to the Tower have proven to be a failure. According to Browning’s poem “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came”, Roland needs to have the horn in his possession, for he is supposed to blow it before entering the Tower. If the horn is missing, that means the journey is doomed to fail. Now Roland, hopefully, has overcome his greatest flaw and finally has a real chance of finding his redemption. According to Vogler, the “higher dramatic purpose of Resurrection is to give an outward sign that the hero has really changed. The old Self must be proven to be completely dead, and the new Self immune to temptations and addictions that trapped the old form” (210).
When it comes to Roland, the only proof the reader is handed regarding his personal change is his possession of the horn. Whether or not that is enough to prove that Roland has changed can never truly be known.

4I Return with the Elixir

During the stage of Return with the Elixir, the hero, having passed all the trials and gained personal psychological growth, has returned to the normal world as a wiser and better person. Vogler explains that:

The most popular story design seems to be the circular or closed form, in which the narrative returns to its starting point. In this structure you might bring the hero literally full circle back to the location or world where she started. Perhaps the Return is circular in a visual or metaphorical way, with a replay of an initial image, or the repetition of a line of dialogue or situation from Act One […] Having your hero Return to her starting point or remember how she started allows you to draw a comparison for the audience. It gives a measure of how far your hero has come, how she’s changed, and how her old world looks different now. (217)

This perfectly describes the way King chooses to end his Dark Tower series. At the end, King places Roland back at the beginning of the story, though without Roland’s knowledge. He not only puts him in the same place, but also the same time, forcing him to re-embark on his journey. However, King indicates clearly that Roland has finally grown enough as a character and learned what he needs to be able to begin the journey again with the necessary changes. This is made obvious in the last paragraphs of The Dark Tower:

He shifted his gunna from one shoulder to the other, then touched the horn that rode on his belt behind the gun on his right hip. The ancient brass horn had once been blown by Arthur Eld himself, or so the story did say. Roland had given it to Cuthbert Allgood at Jericho Hill, and when Cuthbert fell, Roland had paused just long enough to pick it up again, knocking the deathdust of that place from his throat.

This is your sigul whispered the fading voice that bore with it the dusksweet scent of roses, the scent of home on a summer evening – O lost!—a stone, a rose, an unfound door; a stone, a rose, a door.

This is your promise that things may be different, Roland – that there may yet be rest. Even salvation.
A pause, and then:

*If you stand. If you are true.* (King, 671)

Not only does he now carry the sacred horn, the one that Browning’s Roland blows before entering his version of the Tower, but he is also promised salvation if he proves true. This means that if he holds on to the changes he has already gone through, and the lessons he has subconsciously learned during this cycle, he will be allowed rest as well as salvation. However, this interpretation is up to the reader since the ending of *The Dark Tower* adheres to what Vogler calls the open-ended story form: “[s]ome storytellers prefer an open-ended Return. In the open-ended point of view, the storytelling goes on after the story is over; it continues in the minds and hearts of the audience, in the conversations and even arguments people have in coffee shops after seeing a movie or reading a book” (218). The fate of Roland is therefore in the hands of the reader, who must decide if Roland has undergone the psychological growth to make this journey the final one.

It is therefore obvious that the interpretation of the stage of the Return is up to the reader. Batty asserts that “a true hero is one who brings back knowledge and wisdom for the sake of others, providing them with the Elixir of life, the Freedom to Live” (78). These others could be Roland’s ka-tet, as well as everyone who has anything to gain from the salvation of the Tower. According to Vogler, there are a few different versions of the Elixir, one of which is the Elixir of responsibility, “for heroes to take wider responsibility at the Return, giving up their loner status for a place of leadership or service within a group” (222). Should Roland learn from his mistakes and take on the responsibilities of leadership from the very first time he meets Jake, he will truly have brought the Elixir he needed from his quest. Batty argues that “[w]hether physical or emotional in form, it [Elixir] provides the audience with a sense that a road has been travelled and the hero has come home a ‘better’, more developed person” (79). Thus, due to the open-ended form of Roland’s return, it is up to the reader to decide whether or not Roland actually brought the Elixir. Many of King’s Constant Readers have been very unhappy with the ending of the book and feel it leaves too much ambiguity and uncertainty. However, that truly is the beauty of the open-ended conclusion, since this way, Roland’s legend is destined to live on in the minds of the readers as they try to imagine how he has changed and what decisions he will make during the next cycle. The reader has here, in a way, taken on the job of the author, being in control of Roland’s destiny.
5 Reading Roland’s Heroic Journey

Clearly, *The Dark Tower* contains various manifestations of the Hero’s Journey even though there are several variations to the typical form. King’s narrative features a certain fluency regarding the elements of the Hero’s Journey. Roland takes on multiple roles on his quest and can be seen as both the Herald of Change and Mentor, as well as the Hero. Even though Roland begins the series as an antihero, as he navigates the course of his journey alongside his friends, he gradually becomes more heroic. Therefore, in Roland’s mind, his role as the Herald of Change for Eddie, Susannah and Jake, only serves the purpose of propelling him towards the Tower. Similarly, that is what he is thinking when he takes on the role as their Mentor. Then, as the story progresses, Roland becomes more sympathetic towards his companions and he learns from them just as they learn from him. He becomes able to trust and love other people and his narrow mind gradually opens up to the possibility that there might be other things of equal, or more, value than reaching the Tower. This is when the stages of the Hero’s Journey begin to pertain to Roland as the hero. Unfortunately, this is also when he begins to lose his companions, one by one, either to death or because they decide to leave the journey, a clear deviation from the standard form of the Hero’s Journey. At the end of Roland’s quest, it is made clear that he has embarked on this journey countless times before. However, since he keeps on making crucial mistakes, and fails to obtain the psychological growth necessary for his redemption, he appears to be stuck in the perpetual limbo of repeating his quest over and over again. Even so, at the end of *The Dark Tower*, King hints that perhaps the journey Roland is now commencing might be different. His possession of the Horn of Eld indicates that now he will conduct his quest in a different manner and hopefully shed the mantle of antihero and don the one of hero.
6 Conclusion
To sum up, it is clearly possible to see manifestations of the stages of Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey within a vast array of literature. From fairy tales to science fiction and even in real life, the structure of the monomyth is applicable to almost any narrative centering on a character undergoing changes in his or her personal life. This specifically adheres to narratives of great scope featuring protagonists on a quest. Campbell extrapolates his theory of the Hero’s Journey in his groundbreaking book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. There, he divides the hero’s quest into three main parts and each part into further stages. Since then, scholars all around the world have used this specific form to analyze any sort of quest narrative.

It has been explained that Stephen King’s story of *The Dark Tower* revolves around Roland Deschain and his quest to save the Dark Tower from destruction, as well as the fact that it also pertains to Roland’s companions on the journey and his personal psychological growth. King adapted the story itself from Robert Browning’s poem “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” but he also connects the story to various other narratives and genres, such as the substantial influence he derived from the scope of Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* and by Sergio Leone’s spaghetti western *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. It has also been made clear that King uses the scope of Tolkien’s work and combines it with the western backdrop of Leone’s film and then adds an agglomeration of intertextual references. Thus, King has created an epic story of a hero’s quest that touches upon most of Campbell’s stages. However, as has been explained, the stages of the Hero’s Journey as theorized by Christopher Vogler in *The Writer’s Journey* adhere better to Roland’s quest. Furthermore, deviations from the model have been pointed out, such as Roland being an antihero who desperately needs to undergo change should he ever truly wish to complete his quest, as well as the fact that his whole ka-tet forms the basis of the hero, whilst he himself becomes their mentor. Despite this, it is clear that the main elements of the structure have been shown to apply to King’s magnum opus.

Even though *The Dark Tower* may deviate in some ways from Campbell and Vogler’s theories, it has been shown that Roland and his ka-tet are truly on a Hero’s Journey. Roland may be an antihero, but he is the one who calls Eddie, Susannah and Jake to their quest and they leave the Ordinary World to join him. Eddie and Susannah are both reluctant at first but as soon as they cross the threshold, they are ready to take on the threshold guardians that come their way. Furthermore, it has been argued that throughout the rest of the series, the group ventures through all the stages of the Hero’s Journey, although King’s manifestations of many of the stages may differ from their normal portrayal. Where King strays the farthest from the
most common form is by having almost all of Roland’s companions perish along the way, thus not partaking in the stage of resurrection. Additionally, it has been made clear that his journey is no ordinary one. Since he is an antihero and has made choices that disregard the lives of those around him, Roland is doomed to repeat his quest again and again until he is ready to make the changes necessary for his redemption. To conclude, the main ordeal, the reward and road back are the stages that, although still fitting within the scheme of Campbell and Vogler’s structure, are bound to prove variable if, and when, Roland truly changes himself.
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