

#1 BESTSELLER

STEPHEN KING



THE DRAWING OF THE THREE

THE DARK TOWER II

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

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

THE DRAWING OF THE THREE

A Viking Book / published by arrangement with the author

All rights reserved.

Copyright © 2003 by *Stephen King*

This book may not be reproduced in whole or part, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission. Making or distributing electronic copies of this book constitutes copyright infringement and could subject the infringer to criminal and civil liability.

For information address:

The Berkley Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Putnam Inc.,
375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014.

The Penguin Putnam Inc. World Wide Web site address is <http://www.penguinputnam.com>

ISBN: 1-101-14642-7

A VIKING BOOK®

Viking Books first published by The Viking Publishing Group, a member of Penguin Putnam Inc.,
375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014.

VIKING and the "SHIP" design are trademarks belonging to Penguin Putnam Inc.

Electronic edition: June, 2003

ALSO BY STEPHEN KING

NOVELS

Carrie
'Salem's Lot
The Shining
The Stand
The Dead Zone
Firestarter
Cujo

THE DARK TOWER I:

The Gunslinger
Christine
Pet Sematary
Cycle of the Werewolf
The Talisman (*with Peter Straub*)
It
The Eyes of the Dragon
Misery
The Tommyknockers

THE DARK TOWER III:

The Waste Lands
The Dark Half
Needful Things
Gerald's Game
Dolores Claiborne
Insomnia
Rose Madder
Desperation
The Green Mile

THE DARK TOWER IV:

Wizard and Glass
Bag of Bones
The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon
Dreamcatcher
Black House (*with Peter Straub*)
From a Buick 8

AS RICHARD BACHMAN

Rage
The Long Walk
Roadwork
The Running Man
Thinner
The Regulators

COLLECTIONS

Night Shift
Different Seasons
Skeleton Crew
Four Past Midnight
Nightmares and Dreamscapes
Hearts in Atlantis
Everything's Eventual

SCREENPLAYS

Creepshow
Cat's Eye
Silver Bullet
Maximum Overdrive
Pet Sematary
Golden Years
Sleepwalkers
The Stand
The Shining
Rose Red
The Storm of the Century

NONFICTION

Danse Macabre
On Writing

To Don Grant,

who's taken a chance on these *novels*,
one by one.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Argument

PROLOGUE THE SAILOR

THE PRISONER

CHAPTER 1 The Door

CHAPTER 2 Eddie Dean

CHAPTER 3 Contact and Landing

CHAPTER 4 The Tower

CHAPTER 5 Showdown and Shoot-Out

SHUFFLE

THE LADY OF SHADOWS

CHAPTER 1 Detta and Odetta

CHAPTER 2 Ringing the Changes

CHAPTER 3 Odetta on the Other Side

CHAPTER 4 Detta on the Other Side

RESHUFFLE

THE PUSHER

CHAPTER 1 Bitter Medicine

CHAPTER 2 The Honey-pot

CHAPTER 3 Roland Takes His Medicine

CHAPTER 4 The Drawing

FINAL SHUFFLE

AFTERWORD

ILLUSTRATIONS

DID-A-CHICK

ROLAND

ON THE BEACH

SOUVENIR

WAITING FOR ROLAND

DETTA

WAITING FOR THE PUSHER

NOTHING BUT THE HILT

JACK MORT

THEGUNSLINGER

INTRODUCTION

On Being Nineteen

(and a Few Other Things)

1

Hobbits were big when I was nineteen (a number of some import in the stories you are about to read).

There were probably half a dozen Merrys and Pippins slogging through the mud at Max Yasgur's farm during the Great Woodstock Music Festival, twice as many Frodos, and hippie Gandalfs without number. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* was madly popular in those days, and while I never made it to Woodstock (say sorry), I suppose I was at least a halfling-hippie. Enough of one, at any rate, to have read the books and fallen in love with them. The *Dark Tower* books, like most long fantasy tales written by men and women of my generation (*The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*, by Stephen Donaldson, and *The Sword of Shannara*, by Terry Brooks, are just two of many), were born out of Tolkien's.

But although I read the books in 1966 and 1967, I held off writing. I responded (and with rather touching wholeheartedness) to the sweep of Tolkien's imagination—to the ambition of his story—but I wanted to write my own kind of story, and had I started then, I would have written his. That, as the late Tricky Dick Nixon was fond of saying, would have been wrong. Thanks to Mr. Tolkien, the twentieth century had all the elves and wizards it needed.

In 1967, I didn't have any idea what my kind of story might be, but that didn't matter; I felt positive I'd know it when it passed me on the street. I was nineteen and arrogant. Certainly arrogant enough to feel I could wait a little while on my muse and my masterpiece (as I was sure it would be). At nineteen, it seems to me, one has a right to be arrogant; time has usually not begun its stealthy and rotten subtractions. It takes away your hair and your jump-shot, according to a popular country song, but in truth it takes away a lot more than that. I didn't know it in 1966 and '67, and if I had, I wouldn't have cared. I could imagine—barely—being forty, but fifty? No. *Sixty?* Never! *Sixty* was out of the question. And at nineteen, that's just the way to be. Nineteen is the age where you say *Look out, world, I'm smokin' TNT and I'm drinkin' dynamite, so if you know what's good for ya, get out of my way—here comes Stevie.*

Nineteen's a selfish age and finds one's cares tightly circumscribed. I had a lot of reach, and I cared about that. I had a lot of ambition, and I cared about that. I had a typewriter that I carried from one shithole apartment to the next, always with a deck of smokes in my pocket and a smile on my face. The compromises of middle age were distant, the insults of old age over the horizon. Like the protagonist in that Bob Seger song they now use to sell the trucks, I felt endlessly powerful and endlessly optimistic; my pockets were empty, but my head was full of things I wanted to say and my heart

was full of stories I wanted to tell. Sounds corny now; felt wonderful then. Felt very cool. More than anything else I wanted to get inside my readers' defenses, wanted to rip them and ravish them and change them forever with nothing but story. And I felt I could do those things. I felt I had been *made* to do those things.

How conceited does that sound? A lot or a little? Either way, I don't apologize. I was nineteen. There was not so much as a strand of gray in my beard. I had three pairs of jeans, one pair of boots, the idea that the world was my oyster, and nothing that happened in the next twenty years proved me wrong. Then, around the age of thirty-nine, my troubles set in: drink, drugs, a road accident that changed the way I walked (among other things). I've written about them at length and need not write about them here. Besides, it's the same for you, right? The world eventually sends out a mean-ass Patrol Boy to slow your progress and show you who's boss. You reading this have undoubtedly met yours (or will); I met mine, and I'm sure he'll be back. He's got my address. He's a mean guy, a Bad Lieutenant, the sworn enemy of goofery, fuckery, pride, ambition, loud music, and all things nineteen.

But I still think that's a pretty fine age. Maybe the best age. You can rock and roll all night, but when the music dies out and the beer wears off, you're able to think. And dream big dreams. The mean Patrol Boy cuts you down to size eventually, and if you start out small, why, there's almost nothing left but the cuffs of your pants when he's done with you. "Got another one!" he shouts, and strides on with his citation book in his hand. So a little arrogance (or even a lot) isn't such a bad thing, although your mother undoubtedly told you different. Mine did. *Pride goeth before a fall, Stephen*, she said . . . and then I found out—right around the age that is 19×2 —that eventually you fall down, anyway. Or get pushed into the ditch. At nineteen they can card you in the bars and tell you to get the fuck out, put your sorry act (and sorrier ass) back on the street, but they can't card you when you sit down to paint a picture, write a poem, or tell a story, by God, and if you reading this happen to be very young, don't let your elders and supposed betters tell you any different. Sure, you've never been to Paris. No, you never ran with the bulls at Pamplona. Yes, you're a pissant who had no hair in your armpits until three years ago—but so what? If you don't start out too big for your britches, how are you gonna fill 'em when you grow up? Let it rip regardless of what anybody tells you, that's my idea; sit down and *smoke* that baby.

2

I think novelists come in two types, and that includes the sort of fledgling novelist I was by 1970. Those who are bound for the more literary or "serious" side of the job examine every possible subject in light of this question: *What would writing this sort of story mean to me?* Those whose destiny (or ka, if you like) is to include the writing of popular novels are apt to ask a very different one: *What would writing this sort of story mean to others?* The "serious" novelist is looking for answers and keys to the self; the "popular" novelist is looking for an audience. Both kinds of writer are equally selfish. I've known a good many, and will set my watch and warrant upon it.

Anyway, I believe that even at the age of nineteen, I recognized the story of Frodo and his efforts to rid himself of the One Great Ring as one belonging to the second

group. They were the adventures of an essentially British band of pilgrims set against a backdrop of vaguely Norse mythology. I liked the idea of the quest—*loved* it, in fact—but I had no interest in either Tolkien’s sturdy peasant characters (that’s not to say I didn’t like them, because I did) or his bosky Scandinavian settings. If I tried going in that direction, I’d get it all wrong.

So I waited. By 1970 I was twenty-two, the first strands of gray had showed up in my beard (I think smoking two and a half packs of Pall Malls a day probably had something to do with that), but even at twenty-two, one can afford to wait. At twenty-two, time is still on one’s side, although even then that bad old Patrol Boy’s in the neighborhood and asking questions.

Then, in an almost completely empty movie theater (the Bijou, in Bangor, Maine, if it matters), I saw a film directed by Sergio Leone. 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. If you’ve only seen this gonzo Western on your television screen, you don’t understand what I’m talking about—cry your pardon, but it’s true. On a movie screen, projected through the correct Panavision lenses, *TG, TB, & TU* is an epic to rival *Ben-Hur*. Clint Eastwood appears roughly eighteen feet tall, with each wiry jut of stubble on his cheeks looking roughly the size of a young redwood tree. The grooves bracketing Lee Van Cleef’s mouth are as deep as canyons, and there could be a thinny (see *Wizard and Glass*) at the bottom of each one. The desert settings appear to stretch at least out as far as the orbit of the planet Neptune. And the barrel of each gun looks to be roughly as large as the Holland Tunnel.

What I wanted even more than the setting was that feeling of epic, apocalyptic *size*. The fact that Leone knew jack shit about American geography (according to one of the characters, Chicago is somewhere in the vicinity of Phoenix, Arizona) added to the film’s sense of magnificent dislocation. And in my enthusiasm—the sort only a young person can muster, I think—I wanted to write not just a *long* book, but *the longest popular novel in history*. I did not succeed in doing that, but I feel I had a decent rip; *The Dark Tower*, Volumes One through Seven, really comprise a single tale, and the first four volumes run to just over two thousand pages in paperback. The final three volumes run another twenty-five hundred in manuscript. I’m not trying to imply here that length has anything whatsoever to do with quality; I’m just saying that I wanted to write an epic, and in some ways, I succeeded. If you were to ask me *why* I wanted to do that, I couldn’t tell you. Maybe it’s a part of growing up American: build the tallest, dig the deepest, write the longest. And that head-scratching puzzlement when the question of motivation comes up? Seems to me that that is also part of being an American. In the end we are reduced to saying *It seemed like a good idea at the time*.

3

Another thing about being nineteen, do it please ya: it is the age, I think, where a lot of us somehow get stuck (mentally and emotionally, if not physically). The years slide by and one day you find yourself looking into the mirror with real puzzlement. *Why are*

those lines on my face? you wonder. *Where did that stupid potbelly come from? Hell, I'm only nineteen!* This is hardly an original concept, but that in no way subtracts from one's amazement.

Time puts gray in your beard, time takes away your jump-shot, and all the while you're thinking—silly you—that it's still on your side. The logical side of you knows better, but your heart refuses to believe it. If you're lucky, the Patrol Boy who cited you for going too fast and having too much fun also gives you a dose of smelling salts. That was more or less what happened to me near the end of the twentieth century. It came in the form of a Plymouth van that knocked me into the ditch beside a road in my hometown.

About three years after that accident I did a book signing for *From a Buick 8* at a Borders store in Dearborn, Michigan. When one guy got to the head of the line, he said he was really, really glad that I was still alive. (I get this a lot, and it beats the *shit* out of “Why the hell didn't you die?”)

“I was with this good friend of mine when we heard you got popped,” he said. “Man, we just started shaking our heads and saying ‘There goes the Tower, it's tilting, it's falling, ahhh, shit, he'll *never* finish it now.’ ”

A version of the same idea had occurred to me—the troubling idea that, having built the Dark Tower in the collective imagination of a million readers, I might have a responsibility to make it safe for as long as people wanted to read about it. That might be for only five years; for all I know, it might be five hundred. Fantasy stories, the bad as well as the good (even now, someone out there is probably reading *Varney the Vampire* or *The Monk*), seem to have long shelf lives. Roland's way of protecting the tower is to try to remove the threat to the Beams that hold the Tower up. I would have to do it, I realized after my accident, by finishing the gunslinger's story.

During the long pauses between the writing and publication of the first four *Dark Tower* tales, I received hundreds of “pack your bags, we're going on a guilt trip” letters. In 1998 (when I was laboring under the mistaken impression that I was still basically nineteen, in other words), I got one from an “82-yr-old Gramma, don't mean to Bother You w/My Troubles BUT!! very Sick These Days.” The Gramma told me she probably had only a year to live (“14 Mo's at Outside, Cancer all thru Me”), and while she didn't expect me to finish Roland's tale in that time just for her, she wanted to know if I couldn't please (*please*) just tell her how it came out. The line that wrenched my heart (although not quite enough to start writing again) was her promise to “not tell a Single Soul.” A year later—probably after the accident that landed me in the hospital—one of my assistants, Marsha DiFilippo, got a letter from a fellow on death row in either Texas or Florida, wanting to know essentially the same thing: how does it come out? (He promised to take the secret to the grave with him, which gave me the creeps.)

I would have given both of these folks what they wanted—a summary of Roland's further adventures—if I could have done, but alas, I couldn't. I had no idea of how things were going to turn out with the gunslinger and his friends. To know, I have to write. I once had an outline, but I lost it along the way. (It probably wasn't worth a tin shit, anyway.) All I had was a few notes (“Chussit, chissit, chassit, something-something-basket” reads one lying on the desk as I write this). Eventually, starting in July of 2001, I began to write again. I knew by then I was no longer nineteen, nor

exempt from any of the ills to which the flesh is heir. I knew I was going to be sixty, maybe even seventy. And I wanted to finish my story before the bad Patrol Boy came for the last time. I had no urge to be filed away with *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

The result—for better or worse—lies before you, Constant Reader, whether you reading this are starting with Volume One or are preparing for Volume Five. Like it or hate it, the story of Roland is now done. I hope you enjoy it.

As for me, I had the time of my life.

Stephen King

January 25, 2003

19

13

RENEWAL

Argument

The Drawing of the Three is the second volume of a long tale called *The Dark Tower*, a tale inspired by and to some degree dependent upon Robert Browning's narrative poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (which in its turn owes a debt to *King Lear*).

The first volume, *The Gunslinger*, tells how Roland, the last gunslinger of a world which has "moved on," finally catches up with the man in black . . . a sorcerer he has chased for a very long time—just *how* long we do not yet know. The man in black turns out to be a fellow named Walter, who falsely claimed the friendship of Roland's father in those days before the world moved on.

Roland's goal is not this half-human creature but the Dark Tower; the man in black—and, more specifically, what the man in black *knows*—is his first step on his road to that mysterious place.

Who, exactly, is Roland? What was his world like before it "moved on"? What is the Tower, and why does he pursue it? We have only fragmentary answers. Roland is a gunslinger, a kind of knight, one of those charged with holding a world Roland remembers as being "filled with love and light" as it is; to keep it from moving on.

We know that Roland was forced to an early trial of manhood after discovering that his mother had become the mistress of Marten, a much greater sorcerer than Walter (who, unknown to Roland's father, is Marten's ally); we know Marten has planned Roland's discovery, expecting Roland to fail and to be "sent West" we know that Roland triumphs in his test.

What else do we know? That the gunslinger's world is not completely unlike our own. Artifacts such as gasoline pumps and certain songs ("Hey Jude," for instance, or the bit of doggerel that begins "Beans, beans, the musical fruit . . .") have survived; so have customs and rituals oddly like those from our own romanticized view of the American west.

And there is an umbilicus which somehow connects our world to the world of the gunslinger. At a way-station on a long-deserted coach-road in a great and sterile desert, Roland meets a boy named Jake who *died* in our world. A boy who was, in fact, pushed from a street-corner by the ubiquitous (and iniquitous) man in black. The last thing Jake, who was on his way to school with his book-bag in one hand and his lunch-box in the other, remembers of his world—*our* world—is being crushed beneath the wheels of a Cadillac . . . and dying.

Before reaching the man in black, Jake dies again . . . this time because the gunslinger, faced with the second-most agonizing choice of his life, elects to sacrifice this symbolic son. Given a choice between the Tower and child, possibly between damnation and salvation, Roland chooses the Tower.

"Go, then," Jake tells him before plunging into the abyss. "There are other worlds than these."

The final confrontation between Roland and Walter occurs in a dusty golgotha of decaying bones. The dark man tells Roland's future with a deck of Tarot cards. These

cards, showing a man called The Prisoner, a woman called The Lady of Shadows, and a darker shape that is simply Death (“but not for you, gunslinger,” the man in black tells him), are prophecies which become the subject of this volume . . . and Roland’s second step on the long and difficult path to the Dark Tower.

The Gunslinger ends with Roland sitting upon the beach of the Western Sea, watching the sunset. The man in black is dead, the gunslinger’s own future course unclear; *The Drawing of the Three* begins on that same beach, less than seven hours later.

PROLOGUE

THE SAILOR



PROLOGUE

The gunslinger came awake from a confused dream which seemed to consist of a single image: that of the Sailor in the Tarot deck from which the man in black had dealt (or purported to deal) the gunslinger's own moaning future.

He drowns, gunslinger, the man in black was saying, *and no one throws out the line. The boy Jake.*

But this was no nightmare. It was a good dream. It was good because *he* was the one drowning, and that meant he was not Roland at all but Jake, and he found this a relief because it would be far better to drown as Jake than to live as himself, a man who had, for a cold dream, betrayed a child who had trusted him.

Good, all right, I'll drown, he thought, listening to the roar of the sea. *Let me drown.* But this was not the sound of the open deeps; it was the grating sound of water with a throatful of stones. *Was he the Sailor?* If so, why was land so close? And, in fact, was he not *on the land*? It felt as if—

Freezing cold water doused his boots and ran up his legs to his crotch. His eyes flew open then, and what snapped him out of the dream wasn't his freezing balls, which had suddenly shrunk to what felt like the size of walnuts, nor even the horror to his right, but the thought of his guns . . . his guns, and even more important, his shells. Wet guns could be quickly disassembled, wiped dry, oiled, wiped dry again, oiled again, and re-assembled; wet shells, like wet matches, might or might not ever be usable again.

The horror was a crawling thing which must have been cast up by a previous wave. It dragged a wet, gleaming body laboriously along the sand. It was about four feet long and about four yards to the right. It regarded Roland with bleak eyes on stalks. Its long serrated beak dropped open and it began to make a noise that was weirdly like human speech: plaintive, even desperate questions in an alien tongue.

"Did-a-chick? Dum-a-chum? Dad-a-cham? Ded-a-check?"

The gunslinger had seen lobsters. This wasn't one, although lobsters were the only things he had ever seen which this creature even vaguely resembled. It didn't seem afraid of him at all. The gunslinger didn't know if it was dangerous or not. He didn't care about his own mental confusion—his temporary inability to remember where he was or how he had gotten there, if he had actually caught the man in black or if all that had only been a dream. He only knew he had to get away from the water before it could drown his shells.

He heard the grinding, swelling roar of water and looked from the creature (it had stopped and was holding up the claws with which it had been pulling itself along, looking absurdly like a boxer assuming his opening stance, which, Cort had taught them, was called The Honor Stance) to the incoming breaker with its curdle of foam.

It hears the wave, the gunslinger thought. *Whatever it is, it's got ears.* He tried to get up, but his legs, too numb to feel, buckled under him.

I'm still dreaming, he thought, but even in his current confused state this was a belief much too tempting to really be believed. He tried to get up again, almost made it, then fell back. The wave was breaking. There was no time again. He had to settle for moving in much the same way the creature on his right seemed to move: he dug in

with both hands and dragged his butt up the stony shingle, away from the wave.

He didn't progress enough to avoid the wave entirely, but he got far enough for his purposes. The wave buried nothing but his boots. It reached almost to his knees and then retreated. *Perhaps the first one didn't go as far as I thought. Perhaps—*

There was a half-moon in the sky. A caul of mist covered it, but it shed enough light for him to see that the holsters were too dark. The guns, at least, had suffered a wetting. It was impossible to tell how bad it had been, or if either the shells currently in the cylinders or those in the crossed gunbelts had also been wetted. Before checking, he had to get away from the water. Had to—

"*Dod-a-chock?*" This was much closer. In his worry over the water he had forgotten the creature the water had cast up. He looked around and saw it was now only four feet away. Its claws were buried in the stone- and shell-littered sand of the shingle, pulling its body along. It lifted its meaty, serrated body, making it momentarily resemble a scorpion, but Roland could see no stinger at the end of its body.

Another grinding roar, this one much louder. The creature immediately stopped and raised its claws into its own peculiar version of the Honor Stance again.

This wave was bigger. Roland began to drag himself up the slope of the strand again, and when he put out his hands, the clawed creature moved with a speed of which its previous movements had not even hinted.

The gunslinger felt a bright flare of pain in his right hand, but there was no time to think about that now. He pushed with the heels of his soggy boots, clawed with his hands, and managed to get away from the wave.

"*Did-a-chick?*" the monstrosity enquired in its plaintive *Won't you help me? Can't you see I am desperate?* voice, and Roland saw the stumps of the first and second fingers of his right hand disappearing into the creature's jagged beak. It lunged again and Roland lifted his dripping right hand just in time to save his remaining two fingers.

"*Dum-a-chum? Dad-a-cham?*"

The gunslinger staggered to his feet. The thing tore open his dripping jeans, tore through a boot whose old leather was soft but as tough as iron, and took a chunk of meat from Roland's lower calf.

He drew with his right hand, and realized two of the fingers needed to perform this ancient killing operation were gone only when the revolver thumped to the sand.

The monstrosity snapped at it greedily.

"No, bastard!" Roland snarled, and kicked it. It was like kicking a block of rock . . . one that bit. It tore away the end of Roland's right boot, tore away most of his great toe, tore the boot itself from his foot.

The gunslinger bent, picked up his revolver, dropped it, cursed, and finally managed. What had once been a thing so easy it didn't even bear thinking about had suddenly become a trick akin to juggling.

The creature was crouched on the gunslinger's boot, tearing at it as it asked its garbled questions. A wave rolled toward the beach, the foam which curdled its top looking pallid and dead in the netted light of the half-moon. The lobstrosity stopped working on the boot and raised its claws in that boxer's pose.

Roland drew with his left hand and pulled the trigger three times.

Click, click, click.

Now he knew about the shells in the chambers, at least.

He holstered the left gun. To holster the right he had to turn its barrel downward with his left hand and then let it drop into its place. Blood slimed the worn ironwood handgrips; blood spotted the holster and the old jeans to which the holster was thong-tied. It poured from the stumps where his fingers used to be.

His mangled right foot was still too numb to hurt, but his right hand was a bellowing fire. The ghosts of talented and long-trained fingers which were already decomposing in the digestive juices of that thing's guts screamed that they were still there, that they were burning.

I see serious problems ahead, the gunslinger thought remotely.

The wave retreated. The monstrosity lowered its claws, tore a fresh hole in the gunslinger's boot, and then decided the wearer had been a good deal more tasty than this bit of skin it had somehow sloughed off.

"*Dud-a-chum?*" it asked, and scurried toward him with ghastly speed. The gunslinger retreated on legs he could barely feel, realizing that the creature must have some intelligence; it had approached him cautiously, perhaps from a long way down the strand, not sure what he was or of what he might be capable. If the dousing wave hadn't wakened him, the thing would have torn off his face while he was still deep in his dream. Now it had decided he was not only tasty but vulnerable; easy prey.

It was almost upon him, a thing four feet long and a foot high, a creature which might weigh as much as seventy pounds and which was as single-mindedly carnivorous as David, the hawk he had had as a boy—but without David's dim vestige of loyalty.

The gunslinger's left bootheel struck a rock jutting from the sand and he tottered on the edge of falling.

"*Dod-a-chock?*" the thing asked, solicitously it seemed, and peered at the gunslinger from its stalky, waving eyes as its claws reached . . . and then a wave came, and the claws went up again in the Honor Stance. Yet now they wavered the slightest bit, and the gunslinger realized that it responded to the sound of the wave, and now the sound was—for it, at least—fading a bit.

He stepped backward over the rock, then bent down as the wave broke upon the shingle with its grinding roar. His head was inches from the insectile face of the creature. One of its claws might easily have slashed the eyes from his face, but its trembling claws, so like clenched fists, remained raised to either side of its parrotlike beak.

The gunslinger reached for the stone over which he had nearly fallen. It was large, half-buried in the sand, and his mutilated right hand howled as bits of dirt and sharp edges of pebble ground into the open bleeding flesh, but he yanked the rock free and raised it, his lips pulled away from his teeth.

"*Dad-a—*" the monstrosity began, its claws lowering and opening as the wave broke and its sound receded, and the gunslinger swept the rock down upon it with all his strength.

There was a crunching noise as the creature's segmented back broke. It lashed wildly beneath the rock, its rear half lifting and thudding, lifting and thudding. Its interrogatives became buzzing exclamations of pain. Its claws opened and shut upon