

“The Journey of a Wordslinger”

“The Man in Black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed.”

I got chills. The power of that statement was immediately tangible. I was captivated, nearly immediately, and what more did I want? Upon reading that sentence, all I wanted to do was read the book right then and there. As I ventured further into the fantastic and distant, but familiar reality of the Dark Tower series, I found myself becoming emotionally invested in the journey of the gunslinger and his ka-tet as they went about their adventure.

It was the summer after I completed middle school, and I started to come to grips with the fact that I would not be going to high school with most of the people that I knew from middle school. The way that the districts were drawn meant that I would become a Viking at North Salinas High school as opposed to most of my friends becoming Eagles at Everett Alvarez High School. I would no longer be able to see the friends I had made over the past three years every day. I entered an odd state of limbo, and this was at a point where I did not normally hang out with my friends outside of school events, so I had a lot of time to read and get invested.

The series was a gift that was given to me by my dad. When he gave it to me, he let me know that it was going to be more intense of a series in regards to content, and that I had reached a point where reading it would be a great idea. I was maturing and starting to reach the age he was when he had started to read the books. The book was going to include serious topics, but would be an incredible series nonetheless. He had told me that when he was reading the story, it was still being written and he had to wait for the books to come out to keep enjoying the story. This gave me the notion that whatever I was going to be getting into would hopefully be a fraction as incredible as I built it up to be. Small hint, it was going to be ten times as impressive as I had begun to think of, but at this point I haven't even unwrapped the box set yet. The plastic wrap felt needlessly strong as I wanted to be able to hold these books that had captivated my father, and would soon captivate myself as well. Alas, I would not begin to read the books just yet, but getting to hold the first book, *The Gunslinger*, and seeing the stature of the gunslinger himself on the cover piqued my interest in a way like never before. My heart rate rose as the adrenaline of the power this series held became more evident to me.

One of the most immersive scenes I found myself in was at a point where the gunslinger was reminiscing about having a conversation with an old friend in a field of tall lush grass. It was at that point that I had to look around and realize that I wasn't surrounded by flowers, but that I was sitting at my desk, in my grandmother's house, far far away from the world filled with magic and odd creatures of the Dark Tower series' reality. Stephen King's descriptions and story found a way to immerse me in such a way that, while reading, there was no other reality that existed, until he referenced it in the novel. His descriptions could create a cool breeze that would be felt regardless of being in a room without any windows or doors.

Emotionally, the same principles existed easily in King's writing. The emotions that ran through a character's head, could be found resonating within the reader as the situation grew more tense, or even emotional depending on what was happening. The culmination of all of these

elements, all wrapped up in the narrative of a lone gunslinger, became the best piece of writing that I had the chance to experience up to this point in my life, and still holds strong to this day.

While reading the series, I had the revelation that I was reading something at a higher level of writing than I ever had before. Most of the books that I had read up to this point were very enjoyable stories, but not necessarily complex in their language or storytelling. The writing was not required to be complex; I was just reading to enjoy the story. Entering high school, I was starting to learn what good writing could be and what some of its traits could look like.

Little did I know that it would take the journey of a gunslinger to start to realize that my own writing was incredibly far from perfect, much more so than I already realized. By reading a much higher level of writing, I was able to see the differences between my writing, and the complex language and descriptions King creates to tell his story. For the first time, quite possibly ever in my life, I had a chance to look at my writing and actively work towards improving my writing. I still do not consider myself a writer, but that doesn't mean that I could not improve my writing regardless.

I had begun to actively look at my writing assignments and the way that they were graded. The feedback that I received meant much more than they had previously. Akin to receiving advice in fencing, I started to take as much of the advice that was given to me into future writing assignments. Essays were still very tedious and writing them was still difficult, but slowly, I could see improvement. I would still have bad essay days and days where my thoughts would not flow, but overall, I was improving. Through a tale that Stephen King wrote, I was able to have experience with writing on a scale that I had never seen before, and with that experience, I was motivated to improve my writing with whatever help I could receive.

This gave me a chance to realize that my writing is never finalized. It can always be improved upon time and time again. This realization allowed me to come to the conclusion that being able to read and then look back at one's own writing, allows for subconscious improvement, and turning it into conscious improvement leads to even greater potential and growth as a writer. Every time that I look back at older writing of mine, I can't help but think that I have progressed so far from the rudimentary style that I had once lived in, and that I was actually able to improve over time, through the help of analysis of my writing, and finding ways to use the books I was reading to improve my writing.

And to my fellow gunslingers fighting your way through English, may you have "long days and pleasant nights" on your writing journey.