

The Story of the “Territories”

by Kerry Downing

Prologue

"Evidence is growing that there are an infinite number of realities stacked together like the pages of a never-ending book." – Marcus Chown, *The Universe Next Door*

"The quantum theory of parallel universes is not some trouble-some, optional interpretation emerging from arcane theoretical considerations. It is the explanation – the only one that is tenable – of a remarkable and counter-intuitive reality." – David Deutsch, *The Fabric of Reality*

"It's the end of the world as we know it, and I feel fine." – REM, *It's the End of the World as We Know It*

I have always been fascinated with the concept of parallel worlds and the existence of “thin spots” where it might be possible to cross over into another time or place. I find myself drawn to books and movies that deal with this idea. But nowhere have I found a more detailed and intriguing interpretation of this premise than in ‘The Dark Tower’ books written by Stephen King. The worlds that he has created in his books, like our own world, are at the same time both beautiful and dangerous.

When I was trying to decide what type of project I wanted to pursue for this CD, I wanted to choose a subject that interested me to the point that I would have no trouble finding inspiration. Choosing the Dark Tower books turned out to be an easy decision. I have read the books and listened to the audiotapes many times and I always savor my visits. I also enjoy the fact that many of Stephen King’s other novels have referenced the Tower and have given more insight to the characters involved. When I began thinking about this project, I had decided that I wanted to tie in the Territories from the ‘Talisman’ because in my mind, I believed that the Territories and the world of the Dark Tower books were closely related. Stephen King and Peter Straub have since confirmed my feelings with the release of “Black House”.

My desire when creating the compositions of the ‘Territories’ was to give listeners their own “thin spot” that they could use to cross over into the worlds that they love so much. I have always found music to be one of the few portals that one can use to transport themselves to other worlds. I also wanted to allow people to make their own sojourn along the path of the Beam to the Dark Tower. Though many of the landmarks you will find on your trip are similar to those you encounter in the books, the path you take and the events you experience may not be the same as Roland’s ka-tet, but your mission is the same. And in the end, when you reach the Dark Tower, you will stand and be true.

Dennis Downing – May 2003

Crossing Over

"Speedy was gone. The graceful arcs of the roller coaster against the sky were gone. Boardwalk Avenue was gone. He was someplace else now. He was ---

'In the Territories,' Jack whispered, his entire body crawling with a mad mixture of exhilaration. He could feel the hair stirring on the nape of his neck, could feel a goofed-up grin pulling at the corners of his mouth. 'Speedy, I'm here, my God, I'm here in the Territories!' " *Stephen King and Peter Straub-The Talisman*

Gray sky. Gray mood. Gray soul. This is how you feel as you awake and face the day. Another day that is just like all of the others that have gone before. Wake up, go to work, come home, sleep, only to repeat the cycle an untold number of times.

On your way to the office, as you lean into the freshening wind and brace yourself against the coming storm, you drop your briefcase. To your complete surprise, the briefcase sits momentarily on the sidewalk and then, impossibly, falls *through* it. Before you have time to think, you lunge for your briefcase and find yourself following it through the sidewalk and into unfamiliar surroundings.

Struck dumb at first, you begin to look around. The sky is a shade of blue that you have never seen. You take a deep breath and inhale air that is so intoxicatingly fresh it makes you giddy. Green, gently rolling hills extend to the horizon as you slowly turn and look in all directions.

Still dazed and confused, but infused with a feeling of joy that is difficult to contain, you begin to walk. Why you have chosen the direction you are walking you do not know, but you are sure it is the right way.

After several minutes, a small, but very spry, old man emerges from the woods on your right, and crosses into your path. You pull up, shocked and more than a bit frightened. Before you can react, the man speaks.

"Welcome," he says in a deep, baritone voice. "Welcome to our world. We have been waiting for you. I trust you will find your stay here enjoyable and fruitful. We are very happy that you have finally arrived."

Shaking off the initial shock, you finally find your tongue. "What is this place? How did I get here?"

"You crossed over through a thin spot," the man replies matter-of-factly. Seeing the confused look on your face, he continues, "A thin spot in the fabric of time itself. You have left your world and entered ours."

As if his explanation answered all of your questions, the man turns and scurries across the path and continues on his way. He immediately disappears from sight, but you hear him yell, "Follow the Beam! Follow the Beam and you will be fine! Follow it and we will all be fine!"

More confused than ever, but more alive than you have felt in years, you continue on, wondering what "the Beam" is, and how/why you should follow it. A million questions run

through your mind, but for the moment, they seem trivial. You are just content to have found this place.

Gilead (city of love and light)

"Later, the two of them had walked the high battlements above Mid-World's last living city-green and gorgeous Gilead in the morning sun, with its pennons flapping and the vendors in the streets of the Old Quarter and horses trotting on the bridge paths which radiated out from the palace standing at the heart of everything."
Stephen King-DTIV

A few days after arriving in the territories, you crest a densely wooded hill and, through a small clearing in the trees, spy a great walled city in the distance. You stand and stare, unable to believe your eyes, at the graceful spires those walls contain as they rise and disappear into the clouds above.

As you approach, sure that the city must be only for the privileged few, you begin to hear laughter and music. More importantly, you begin to smell food. You have had little more than nuts and berries to eat since you have arrived in this world.

Your appetite awakens as the unmistakable scent of roasting meat grows stronger in your nostrils and urges you forward. Much to your surprise, the gates to the city are wide open and you enter, still afraid that you will be thrown out by the city's guards.

But, quite the contrary. Immediately upon entering, a large hand belonging to an even larger man claps you on the shoulder and thrusts a mug of ale into your left hand, and a roasted turkey leg into your right. Surprised by your good fortune - but not so surprised that you don't devour the food and drink in an instant - you drift through the broad streets of Gilead, city of love and light.

As you wander, music comes from all quarters. Stunningly beautiful maidens skip by, laughing and singing, a sound that makes your heart and spirit soar. Everyone seems genuinely happy to see you, a stranger, in their city.

It's been an exhilarating day, and you find an Inn that has room for you to spend the night. Before retiring, you decide that there is still time for one more mug of ale, so you find a quiet table where you can rest and recount the day's events in your mind.

You overhear a hushed conversation between two men at the next table. Could what they are saying possibly be true? Could this wonderful city that you have only begun to explore be in danger? And who is this person who can save Gilead from "moving on"? You turn discreetly to get a look at the two men, and find that they are staring at you.

Along the Path of the Beam

"And the answer that occurred to him seemed both totally nuts and perfectly reasonable: All things serve the Beam." *Stephen King-DTIII*

After your first night in Gilead, you awake to find that dozens upon dozens of notes, some written in the high speech of the very wealthy, some barely more than unintelligible scratchings, have been slid under your door. They all carry the same message: "Follow The Beam. Save us all."

Unnerved, you leave your room in search of breakfast. As you walk through the Inn and out into the streets of Gilead, people all around you huddle together forming little knots. They talk in low whispers and point at you. An old man dressed in long flowing robes stops immediately in front of you and drops to his knees, raising a small cloud of dust.

Head bowed, the old man begins chanting something that you can't quite make out. He then looks up at you, and in a clear, ageless voice, says, "We have waited long and long for your arrival. Follow The Beam. Save us all."

Now completely confused, you stammer, "The Beam? What is The Beam? How do I find it?"

Wordlessly, the old man shifts his gaze from your face to the sky overhead, and points a long, gnarled finger.

You also look overhead. At first you see nothing except a crow flying across the bright cloudless sky. Suddenly, as the bird continues its flight, it swerves in mid-air, taking a violent shift to the left before continuing on its course. Then you see it: a slight, narrow distortion of the sky itself, slowly and rhythmically undulating as it stretches towards the horizon.

"Is that The Beam?" you ask.

"Follow The Beam. Save us all," the old man responds. The other citizens of Gilead begin to take up the chant. "Follow The Beam. Save us all. Follow The Beam. Save us all."

Reluctantly, you leave Gilead behind, certain that you must follow The Beam, but unsure as to why.

Afraid that you may lose your way, you soon realize that The Beam, once seen, cannot be unseen. While you are somewhat unnerved by the events of the morning, the lush, green rolling hills that you are traveling through soon restore the excitement and anticipation that you felt upon first arriving in this world.

Please take time to enjoy the birds and wildflowers as you travel but be advised: the landscape is apt to change abruptly, and may not always be this tranquil. This world is moving on, and your fate as well as the fate of this and all worlds, lies along the path of The Beam.

Prophecy of the Oracle

"A demon with no shape, only a kind of unformed sexual glare with the eye of prophecy." Stephen King-DTI

Unexpectedly, your path through the forest opens up onto a small clearing where you find an unusual circle of stones. You pull up just outside the circle, unsure how to proceed. As you

stand, weighing your options, a strange force surrounds you. Against your will, you find yourself stepping into the circle.

Once inside the stones, an unseen, wanton presence spills over your body like warm honey. Your first reaction is to struggle and leave the circle, but your feet stay firmly rooted where they are. A soft, seductive voice whispers in your ear, "Please Stay. I have been alone for so long. If you help me, I will help you with your quest."

Your body slowly begins to relax and accept. When the presence finally withdraws, you stumble away from the stones. You are exhausted and spent, and can barely keep your feet, but your direction is now clear. An image of a dark, impossibly tall tower surrounded by a field of blood red roses is burnt into your mind. It is at this tower where your destiny awaits.

The Girl at the Window

"His heart leaped up and although he didn't know it then, it was how he would remember her most clearly forever after-lovely Susan, the girl at the window." *Stephen King-DTIV*

Nestled in the foothills, along the path of the Beam, stands a small cottage. As you approach it, you notice the silhouette of a girl in the cottage's lone front window. Intrigued, you decide to take a closer look.

As you step up onto the first creaky stair leading to the front porch, the door swings open. In the doorway stands a girl. Her skin is very fair, almost like that of a china doll. Her large, brown eyes open wide with anticipation as she breathes, "Please, won't you come in?"

You try to guess the girl's age, but it is impossible. She possesses an ageless beauty the likes of which you have never seen.

You walk through the front door and enter a world of unexpected luxury. The cottage is spacious and well appointed, not at all what you would expect based on its shabby exterior. The smell of cinnamon wafts through the air and you notice that a sumptuous feast is spread out on the dining room table.

"Please, won't you join me?" the girl asks, as she beckons you towards the table.

You eat and drink and talk for hours. The food is fabulous and the conversation lively. Before you know it, the sun is setting and the horizon glows blood red as you look out the cottage's window.

As you say your thanks and begin to make your way towards the door, the girl steps into your path.

"I'm all alone here. Won't you please stay? At least for tonight?"

Your first reaction is to accept this wonderful invitation. You would gladly spend all the rest of your days here in this warm, wonderful oasis where food and companionship abound. But

then, something catches your attention, and you become wary. It's just a small something ... a look in the girl's eyes. A look that betrays her real age, and perhaps her real purpose.

You hastily step around the girl and walk out into the cool evening air. You continue quickly along the path of the Beam, afraid to look back until the cottage is well behind you and out of sight.

Unbeknownst to you, you have passed the first challenge in your quest. The girl, planted by the dark forces that want this world to move on, has failed.

On The Shore of the Western Sea

"It was a long distance from Gilead to the Western Sea-a thousand miles or more-but it had taken me over twenty years to cross that distance." *Stephen King-DTIII*

Your mind is working furiously, recounting the events of the last few days. It's all so incredible, the fact that you are here, wherever here truly is, and everything that has happened. In particular, you think about the girl (was it really a girl?) whom you just left. You are certain that you did the right thing in not accepting her invitation, but the fact is her cottage was warm and inviting, and you are cold, hungry, and lonely.

As you continue following the Beam, you come to a great ocean. The day is drawing to a close as you begin your walk along the beach.

The waves crash along the shore as the water swirls and gurgles around your feet, wet fingers reaching out and trying to drag you down into its dark, mysterious depths. While you can easily pull your feet out of the sea's grasp, your soul is not so lucky.

The continual lonely sound of the waves and the mournful cry of the sea birds drag you down further and further, your soul and your sanity ebbing away with the outgoing tide. "Oh God," you moan. "I just want to go home. Back to where things make sense. Back to the city and..."

You stop. Do you really want to go back? Back to the city that was as surely stealing your life away as this ocean was trying to do? Back to the everyday humdrum existence that was going to kill you with a heart attack before age 50?

Your good humor returns with a vengeance. This is the adventure of a lifetime, and you are determined to make the most of it. You find a small cave along the shore in which to stay for the night. You had better get a good night's rest. There's no telling how long this beach is, or when you will find civilization again.

Reaping Fair

"The farmers' market was booming, the street-stalls were crowded, children were laughing at a Pinch and Jilly show (Jilly was currently chasing Pinch back and forth and bashing the poor old longsuffering fellow with her broom), and the Reaping Fair decorations were going forward at speed." *Stephen King-DTIV*

"All parties come Reaping Fair, aye, tons of em." *Stephen King-DTIV*

Eight days. Eight days of walking the lonely, wind-swept beach. Eight days with nothing but the sounds of the gulls, the waves, and your own breath. When you began your trek along the shore, you spoke aloud, remembering songs and poetry from your school days. But, after a while, the desolation became too much. The songs and speech stopped, both seeming hollow and empty. The ocean did not want to hear them, nor did the gulls. All that was left was the crash of the surf and the call of the hungry seabirds.

As evening draws near on the eighth day, you see lights in the distance. As you hunker down for what hopefully will be your last night on this cold, desolate spit of sand, the sounds of music and laughter float to you on the wind. After a restless night, you awake and begin to walk towards the city.

When you arrive, you are a little disappointed. The city is nothing like Gilead. It is small, very modest. The main street through town is neatly swept, flanked by shops and vendors hawking their wares. Other streets branch off at right angles, each lined by trim cottages, immaculately kept. At the far end of town, a group of townspeople have gathered. As you approach the group, excited voices can be heard as the people crowd together, pushing against one another in an attempt to get to the front of the pack.

One of the locals spots you. "Look! Look," he whispers excitedly to his neighbor as he points in your direction. Soon, the crowd forgets the spectacle in front of them as they part and make a path for you. Your face feels flush but you don't want to be unappreciative, so you make your way to the front of the gathering.

You stand with the locals, watching as the town elders, clad in their ceremonial robes, solemnly make their way across the square to a long, wooden table laden with food and drink. As the town constable turns to the waiting crowd and raises his glass to toast the successful harvest, the celebration begins in earnest. You let out a loud cheer along with the others and, after weeks of traveling along the path of the Beam, you begin to relax, looking forward to a much-needed respite. You find it difficult to relax, however, as everywhere you go people stop, point, and whisper.

Thunderclap

"This is the blood that has flowed out of Thunderclap and threatens to drown our side of the world, he thinks, and it will not be for untold years that he will finally rediscover his time inside the ball and put this memory together with Eddie's dream and tell his com-padres, as they sit in the turnpike breakdown lane at the end of the night, that he was wrong, that he had been fooled by the brilliance, coming as it did, so hard on the heels of Thunderclap's shadows." *Stephen King-DTIV*

You awaken from a fitful night. Wiping the sleep out of your eyes, you get up and walk over to the window. After pulling back the curtains, you look out at the village that has been your home for the last seven sunsets. The village that has taken you in and made you welcome after your long, lonely trek along the beach. The streets are deserted, very unusual for this time of day. Something is different. Something is wrong.

Your gaze rises above the village itself and stops at a jagged mountain range on the horizon. The peaks of this range jut up into the sky like rotten teeth sticking out of a shattered skull. The mountains separate this world, a world of beauty and light, from a much darker place. This other place is a world that has moved on. Most of the villagers will not mention its name. Those that do will only do so in a whisper, afraid of being overheard by the dark forces that want this world to move on as well. The name of this place is Thunderclap.

On the best of days, the Thunderclap Mountains are foreboding but today, dark clouds are streaking over the mountaintops, blotting out the sun and shrouding the village in darkness. A chill runs down your spine and gooseflesh rises on your neck.

Suddenly the door behind you swings open and one of the town elders bursts into your room. He is carrying a sword on his belt, and a scythe in his left hand. He runs up to you and grabs you roughly by the shoulder. There is a wild look in his usually cool, blue eyes.

"Hurry! Hurry! You must leave before it is too late! You need to leave now!" he screams. "They're coming! They're coming!"

Shaken, you are silent for a moment, but finally manage a reply. "Who's coming? And why do I have to leave?" You look at the man's tired, worn face. He has calmed down a bit, but his eyes are still wild, darting from side to side.

"The Wolves are coming. They're coming for the children. They're coming for the children like they always do. And they'll take you too! They know that you are the only hope for this world, and they'll take you just as sure as you are standing here, of that you can be sure!"

"The Wolves? Who are the Wolves and ..."

The man interrupts. "We do not have time for this!"

You gently remove the man's hand from your shoulder and take a step back away from him. Sensing that you are not going anywhere without an explanation, the elder stops for a moment, takes in a deep breath and begins to explain.

"The Wolves are minions of the dark forces that want this and all worlds to move on. Every generation or so, they come down from the Thunderclap Mountains and ravage the

countryside. They leave unspeakable destruction in their wake, and take the weakest among us, the children, back to the mountains with them so they can torture them, and devour them, at their leisure.”

The man stops, unsure as to whether or not he should continue. Finally, in a halting voice, he looks you straight in the eye and says, “This time, however, is different. They aren’t coming *just* for the children. This time, they are also coming for you. They know that you can destroy them and save the Dark Tower, and they are not going to let that happen.”

Fear grips you and you feel sick to your stomach. You sit down on the edge of the bed, afraid that you will faint. You look up at the man who is now standing over you. You no longer see fear in his eyes. Instead, you see pity. “What should I do?” you whisper.

“The men of the village are going to fight. Most of them are already on their way to the mountains to battle the Wolves before they can reach the village.”

Again, the man lays his hand on your shoulder, but this time in a fatherly manner. “You, my friend, must leave. You must continue your quest and follow the Beam. It is the only hope for you ... and for us.”

You slowly nod your head in understanding. You pack up your meager belongings and continue your journey, afraid to leave, but more afraid to stay.

You will never return this way again, nor will you know that the men of the village are successful in their fight against the Wolves. Your presence gave them the hope and strength they needed to be victorious, but your thoughts, and battles, lie ahead.

Ka Like the Wind

“Ka like a wind, my father said, it takes what it will and minds the plea of no man or woman.” Stephen King-DTIV

More than a little shaken by the knowledge that the Wolves were coming for you, you continue on. Your mind is confused, and your reason for being here in this strange world is muddled. The world which seemed exciting, offering you the adventure of a lifetime, has become worn and tattered around the edges. Trouble lurks in every shadow, and you realize, for the first time, you are in physical danger. This is not a game. The dark forces that want this and all worlds to move on have turned their blood shot eyes on a new target – you.

Suddenly, ahead of you just off the path, you see something. Afraid, you duck behind a tree and cautiously peer out. The thing is a man. His back is turned towards you, his head slumped forward. Tangles of gray hair plunge down his back, and the sounds of snoring can be heard in the otherwise silent forest.

Still cautious, you come out from behind the tree and approach the man.

In a soft voice, you try to get the man’s attention. “Excuse me sir. I don’t mean to startle you but ...”

The man's head springs up and he wheels around to face you. You let out a loud gasp and stumble backwards. Where the man's head should be is instead a blank computer screen. His – its – body looks perfectly normal, and great bushels of gray hair outline his – its – face – screen.

Its black, lifeless screen stares at you. You begin to back away from the machine, when finally it speaks to you in a tinny, mechanical voice. "Please do not go. I have been waiting for you." As these words are spoken, a green line squiggles across its black face.

Still afraid, your fight or flight instinct leaning toward the latter, you ask, "Waiting for me? For what possible reason in this insane world would you be waiting for me?"

"To help you understand why you are here," the machine/man answers.

You laugh, a short, harsh, bark. "Awww come on. There's no real reason why I'm here. I fell through some kind of worm hole, or black hole, or maybe it was just a common everyday man hole, and that's why I'm here. There's no rhyme or reason. Everybody keeps telling me that I'm here to save this world, and them, but just exactly how in the hell am I supposed to do that?"

The machine/man starts to speak, but you are on a roll, "And maybe you, the great and powerful Oz, can tell me why I would want to save this world? What has it done for me lately except scare the living crap out of me!" You fall silent, staring at the machine's blank face.

"You are here," the man/machine finally responds, "because it is your destiny ... your Ka, as it were."

"My Ka? Sounds like something my friends back east would say ... "Park the Ka, but not too fa." You laugh at your own little joke. "What in the world is Ka?"

The man/machine, apparently having no sense of humor, replies matter-of-factly. "Ka is what makes this and all worlds function. It is no more than the fate of the simplest particle, and no less than the fate of all worlds. Ka is what brought you here, and Ka is what will see you through, regardless of the outcome."

Fear grips you again. "Do you know what my 'outcome' will be?" you ask, not really wanting to hear the answer.

"No one can know Ka, with the possible exception of the Crimson King, but even that is not certain. Maybe a simple rhyme I was programmed with decades ago will help you remember the concept of Ka:

Ka like a wind
Ka like a wheel
No matter its form
Your fate it will seal"

The machine/man's face goes blank again.

Feeling more frightened than ever, your instinct tells you to run, and this time you obey it. You bolt past the machine, and continue along, following the Beam. As the gap between you and the machine widens, you hear its mechanical voice on the wind:

“Remember ...

Ka like a wind
Ka like a wheel
No matter its form
Your life it will steal”

Court of the Crimson King

ALL HAIL THE CRIMSON KING

"To speak of The Beast is to speak of the ruination of one's own soul." Stephen King-DTI

Ka...Ka...Ka. The word turns over and over in your mind. Is it true? Is it your destiny to save this world and its people? Or, is it your destiny simply to *try* and save this world and its people from the forces that wish to destroy it? You don't know. You are tired and confused. Your body and mind are weary beyond reason. Your legs feel as if they are made of lead and they refuse to listen to your overworked brain any longer. You fall to your knees, too exhausted to go on. Tears flow freely.

In a moment, a vision fills your mind. You see it clearly, and are unable to shake it. You see a room, high up in a tower. It is the same tower that the Oracle you encountered earlier showed you, of that you are certain.

In this room, shrouded in a cloak the color of dried blood, is a man. His face is hidden in shadow. He is known as Ram Abbalah, or the Crimson King.

In your vision, the Crimson King slowly moves out of the shadow and towards you. He is stunningly handsome, his chiseled features and dark hair bathed in a radiant light from above.

As he moves closer, the mask he is wearing falls away. Left in its place is a hideous creature, gaping mouth showing jagged yellow teeth, saliva dripping from the corners of its deformed lips.

You open your mouth to scream but no sound emerges. The vision is not through with you quite yet.

You learn that this creature, Ram Abbalah, in a bid to garner control over all worlds, attempted to ascend through all levels of the tower. While reaching levels higher than anyone before him, he soon found himself trapped, unable to travel further up, or retreat the way he came.

Ram Abbalah, the Crimson King, still wields great power. Through his minions and with the help of his Breakers, he hopes to one day be set free. With all worlds in chaos and the Tower destroyed, he would be the ruler of worlds beyond telling.

The vision relents and the scream you have been trying to release is torn from your lungs. Spent and frightened, your mind tells you to turn back but surprisingly, you find your feet again and continue along the path of the Beam, towards the Tower.

Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came

'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.'

Robert Browning, 1855

As evening approaches, teetering on the edge between twilight and darkness, you crest a ridge. The sky overhead has lost all shades of blue, and is now a deep purple, the color of an old bruise. Squinting in the rapidly fading light, you see it; a field stretching for miles, climbing a gentle slope of land. Standing at the top of the slope, silhouetted against the setting sun, is the Dark Tower.

The Dark Tower. A pillar of stone rising so high into the sky that you can barely discern its tip. Its base, surrounded by red, shouting roses, is formidable, yet the Tower becomes oddly graceful as it rises and tapers to a needle sharp point. Narrow windows, hardly more than slits, march about it in a rising spiral. Below the windows run an almost endless flight of stone stairs, circling up and up.

You are filled with wonder and joy. How gorgeous and strange it all is. From the top of the Tower comes a golden blast of some tremendous horn. Its sound seems to fill the world. You have reached your goal and the time has come. After all of the travels, adventures and danger that you have overcome to reach this moment, it is time to fulfill your destiny. One more test. A test that you must pass to save this, and perhaps all worlds, from becoming desolate wastelands. You must prevail.