

DOCTOR SLEEP

STEPHEN KING

READING GROUP GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK:

In Brief:

In *Doctor Sleep*, STEPHEN KING returns to the characters and territory of one of his most popular novels ever, *The Shining*. This is an epic, glorious story that will thrill both the millions of fans of *The Shining* and anyone new to this icon of the King canon.

On highways across America, a tribe of people called The True Knot travel in search of sustenance. They look harmless - mostly old, lots of polyester, and devoted to their comfortable Recreational Vehicles. But they live off the steam that children with the 'shining' produce when they are slowly tortured to death.

Following a childhood haunted by the time he spent with his parents at the Overlook Hotel, Dan has been drifting for decades, desperate to shed his father's legacy of despair, alcoholism, and violence. Finally, sustained by an AA community, he settles into a job at a nursing home in a rural New Hampshire town where his remnant 'shining power provides the crucial final comfort to the dying. Aided by a prescient cat, he becomes 'Doctor Sleep'.

Then Dan meets the evanescent Abra Stone, and it is her spectacular gift, the brightest 'shining' ever seen, that reignites Dan's own demons and summons him to a battle for Abra's soul and survival...

In Detail:

Doctor Sleep is the long awaited sequel to Stephen King's classic horror novel, *The Shining*. The story follows the fate of the adult Dan Torrance, a man trying to escape both his ghosts and his alcoholism. Beginning where *The Shining* left off, the novel opens with a flashback of the destruction of the Overlook Hotel. But despite the fact that the Overlook has been reduced to ashes, we soon learn that neither the place nor its evil ghosts are done with Danny.

When we first meet the adult Dan, he has reached a terribly low point in his life. A regular binge drinker, he has finally committed an act for which he cannot forgive himself. He has stolen money from a one-night-stand, and left her toddler in the house, even though he knows the child is being abused. Horrified and disgusted by his own desperation and callousness, Dan drifts into the New Hampshire town of Frazier and into a job at a hospice. There, Dan becomes sober and builds a life for himself. Now known as 'Doctor Sleep', he helps the dying cross over the veil. But Dan's 'shine' attracts the attention of a young girl with a powerhouse of a talent. The girl's name is Abra Stone, and like Dan, she was born with a caul covering her face.

Despite the difference in their ages, Abra and Dan become friends. But Abra's talent is about to attract unwanted attention. Built on the ruins of the Overlook Hotel is the Blue Bell Campground, a camp for Recreational Vehicles that is the home of a group of vampires known as the True Knot. Only the True Knot does not live on blood. Instead they live on steam - their term for the 'shine', or the psychic gifts, of children.

Using her own form of 'shining', the True Knot's leader, Rose the Hat, detects Abra's power; she knows that the steam she could collect from the girl would feed her tribe for years. Together, Dan and Abra must fight the True Knot, and finally destroy their ancient evil.

QUOTES:

'...a powerful sequel to *The Shining*' – *Observer*

'As addictive as anything he has written: a triumph from the world's finest horror novelist' – *Sunday Express*

'It's a gripping, powerful novel, all the more so for being patently heartfelt' – *Financial Times*

'King finds a mode of the supernatural that has a melancholic beauty' - *Guardian, Book of the Week*

'Wild ectoplasmic partly decayed vampire horses would not tear from me the story of what happens next, but let me assure you King is a pro: by the end of this book your fingers will be mere stubs of their former selves, and you will be looking askance at the people in the supermarket line, because if they turn around they might have metallic eyes. King's inventiveness and skill show no signs of slacking: *Doctor Sleep* has all the virtues of his best work' – Margaret Atwood, *New York Times*

'Both an excellent sequel to *The Shining* and a strong novel in its own right, this is one of King's best books in the last decade' – *SciFi Bulletin*

'King has written a sequel, the tale of what happened to little Danny when he grew up. Need one say more? It cannot fail...the best thing to emerge from King's glittering, warped imagination is of mundane, small-town America corrupted by hidden forces...you cannot but respect his ruthless expertise as a storyteller...even those of us who would never freely pick up a Stephen King must genuflect to a master – *The Times*

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY:

Stephen King was born in Portland, Maine, in 1947 and won a scholarship to attend the University of Maine at Orono. While working at the university library he met Tabitha Spruce, who was also an aspiring writer. The two of them married in 1971, the year after Stephen King graduated from college. Although during the first months of his marriage King worked as a labourer at an industrial laundry (supplementing his income by selling occasional short stories to men's magazines), by autumn he had taken up a teaching position at Hampden Academy. King continued to write on weekends and during the evening, but his teaching responsibilities seriously cut into his creative time. He also began to drink; as he describes in his guide *On Writing*, he didn't realize until much later that he was kind of writing about himself in *The Shining*.

King got his big break in 1973, when Doubleday and Co. (US) accepted the novel *Carrie*. In the autumn of 1974, Stephen King and his wife spent one night at the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, Colorado. Since the hotel was to close down the following day, the Kings were the only guests. As they wandered through the deserted corridors and ate a meal in the deserted dining, King thought that the grand hotel would be the perfect setting for a ghost story. That year he began writing *The Shining*. *Doctor Sleep* is King's long awaited sequel to that book.

Stephen is the 2003 recipient of The National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. Many of his books have been turned into celebrated films and television series including *Carrie*, *Misery*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Shining* and *Under the Dome*.

STARTING POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Why do you think Stephen King begins *Doctor Sleep* with a flashback to the destruction of the Overlook Hotel?
2. The first ghost we encounter in *Doctor Sleep* is Mrs Massey, the monstrous dead woman from Room 217. This haunting is not just a vision – it is extremely physical. Why do you think Stephen King decided to resurrect this particular ghost, and how does this haunting foreshadow what is to come?
3. What is a lockbox? What purpose does it serve? Who gives one to young Danny? Is this significant? When you first learned about lockboxes, did you foresee any dangers in their use? Did you think that they might provide plot twists later in the story?
4. The first time we see the adult Danny Torrance he steals money from a young woman and leaves her toddler there, though he knows the child is being abused. Authors usually want us to identify with and like their main characters. Why does King purposefully present Danny in this way? How does it tie in to the end of the novel?
5. Why is it so significant that Danny sees his old friend Tony as soon as he enters the town of Frazier?
6. In what ways does the story of *Doctor Sleep* constantly echo *The Shining*? What flashbacks, visions, or characters repeat? In what ways does it radically diverge from the earlier novel?
7. Who is Rose the Hat? When do we first hear about her? Why is this significant?
8. In *The Shining* we learn that Danny Torrance was born with a caul. In *Doctor Sleep*, we learn that Abra was born with a caul as well. How does this connect the two of them? What is the magical significance of the name Abra?
9. Once we meet Abra and the True Knot, a powerful dichotomy between good and evil is set up. How does Stephen King create the tension between these two forces?
10. What is steam? How does the True Knot extract steam?
11. What is the relationship between the Overlook, the Blue Bell Campground, and The True Knot?
12. When you learned that Lucy Stone and Dan Torrance are half-siblings, did it change the way you viewed the relationship between Dan and Abra? How?

13. In what ways is Dan determined NOT to be like his father? How does this work through the novel's plot and climax?

14. What role does AA play in the plot of the story?

15. At the end of *Doctor Sleep*, we're told that 'Life was a wheel, its one purpose was to turn, and it always came back to where it had started.' How is this reflected in the plotting of the novel?

You can read an extract of Doctor Sleep [here](#)