

Part Three:

THE SHINING

Origin Story

Stephen King says his 1977 novel *The Shining* began with a vague idea to write something similar to Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt," a short story in which future technology allows a pair of children to manifest dreamlike images of an African grassland—populated by a pride of hungry lions—on the wall of their nursery. The children's parents believe the exotic environment is merely an illusion… until the lions eat them. King liked the idea of "a kid who can make things real" so much that it became "half of the idea" for a new novel (King: *Dick* 1980). A few years later, the second half came to him in the shower, when he realized that "the power to make dreams—or nightmares—become real might be in a place, like the nursery in 'The Veldt.'" (King: "On *The Shining*" 1982).

For a while, King struggled to come up with the appropriate place. He thought about setting his story—working title: *Darkshine*—in an amusement park, but scrapped that idea because he knew it would make the central conflict too easy to resolve. He explains, "The thing is, you can't really cut a family off in an amusement park; they'll go next door and say, 'We've got some problems here'" (Beahm 2015). *Darkshine* remained in gestation until the fall of 1974, when King's family was living in Boulder, Colorado. The author remembers, "We went to Colorado because I wanted a book with a different setting. And nothing was coming. Somebody said we should go to Estes Park, which was about thirty miles away, and stay at the Stanley Hotel, a famous hotel that supposedly was where Johnny Ringo, the legendary badman, was shot down" (Allen 1979). For the record, Johnny Ringo died in Turkey Creek Canyon, Arizona, nearly three decades before The Stanley was built—but why let that get in the way of a good story? King quickly learned that The Stanley had plenty of other ghosts.

Opened in 1909 by Yankee inventor F.O. Stanley, the hotel was supposedly bulldozer-ready in the winter of 1974-1975 when the Kings came for a visit. In his book *Spirit of the Stanley*, former owner Frank J. Normali describes what the place looked like at the time: "Curls of peeling paint shrouded the hotel's columns in dirty fringes, and spidered along the porch railings. Many of the doors and windows of the lower floor were boarded shut, while most of the upper casements were broken." Inside, things appeared equally grim: "Over a thousand windows in the hotel were cracked or broken. Many of the rooms didn't have running water or flushing toilets. The building needed a new power plant. A sprinkler system had to be installed. There were cracks in the ceiling, carpeting needed to be replaced, and doors needed to be rehung. Not to mention that porches were caving in, nearly everything had to be repainted, and except for the fireplaces, there was no heat." Although he knew the place was a money pit, Normali was enchanted by The Stanley and vowed to restore it to its former glory.

In his book, Normali also remembers Stephen and Tabitha King's visit to the hotel. He claims the couple spent the night in Room 217, the reputedly haunted Presidential Suite, and that he gave Steve a private tour the following day—providing scraps of information that later inspired the horror writer's novel. In interviews, King recalls having dinner in an eerily empty ballroom and exploring a "warren of corridors and doorways" with "jungly" carpets and "old-fashioned fire extinguishers along the walls that were thick and serpentine" (Allen 1979). The author says that when he went to sleep in Room 217, he had a nightmare about his three-year-old son Joe getting chased through the hotel by one of the firehoses. When he woke up, he knew he had found the perfect setting for his long-gestating novel.

King returned to Boulder and rented a room where he could write undisturbed for the next several weeks. He outlined the novel—re-titled *The Shine*—as a stage play, and divided it into acts and scenes instead of chapters. In a 1981 interview, he said, "I set the book in the form of a Shakespearean tragedy, and that was really all I knew. It was going to be in five acts, which finally translated themselves into parts: *Job Interview and Preparatory Matters, Closing Day, Wasp's Nest, Snowbound*, and *Matters of Life and Death*" (Moore 1981).

Initially, *The Shine* was going to be a straightforward ghost story akin to Shirley Jackson's 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House*, which King has referred

to as the archetypal story of "the Bad Place." For him, the central question in Jackson's novel is whether it's the house or the people inside the house that are haunted. In his book *Danse Macabre*, King concludes that Jackson "would like us to come away from her novel with the ultimate belief that it was Hill House all along." The statement also seems to reflect King's interpretation of his finished novel about The Overlook Hotel. Still, there is some ambiguity about the narrative voice of *The Shining* which makes the novel somewhat open to interpretation.

Part One of King's novel establishes Jack Torrance and his family—wife Wendy and 5-year-old son Danny—as winter caretakers of a hotel with a long history of violence. In his interview for the job, Jack learns that a previous caretaker named Delbert Grady murdered his wife and two young daughters there. Because Jack is running from a history of alcohol-fueled violence, he regards the Overlook as a place of refuge rather than a danger to anyone. For him, The Overlook Hotel symbolizes a second—and perhaps final—chance to be a successful writer and a good father. He is oblivious to the fact his preternaturally gifted son also knows about the hotel's violent past and has had some horrifying premonitions about the family's future there.

In Part Two, hotel employee Dick Hallorann recognizes Danny's psychic ability—which the boy attributes to his imaginary friend "Tony." Hallorann, who shares Danny's psychic abilities, refers to the power as "shining" and loosely defines it as a combination of telepathy and clairvoyance. Unfortunately, Hallorann underestimates the Overlook Hotel's ability to shine, and tells Danny that his visions are as harmless as "pictures in a book." He counsels Danny to turn his back on anything there that scares him. That might be good advice for a boy with an overactive imagination but it turns out to be very bad advice for a boy trapped in a haunted hotel with an emotionally volatile father.

In Part Three, both Jack and Danny learn that the hotel can hurt them. First, the Overlook reanimates a nest full of dead wasps, which attack Danny and make Jack feel guilty for putting his son in danger. Later, Jack discovers a mysterious scrapbook detailing the hotel's dark history, and a series of newspaper clippings draw him deeper into a personal obsession with The Overlook. He begins to experience hallucinations he can't rationally explain—including vivid visions of his dead father, who physically and emotionally abused him as a boy.

As Jack begins to doubt his sanity, Danny learns to fear his father as well as the unseen ghosts of the hotel.

The haunting becomes undeniably real for Danny at the end of Part Three, when he encounters a living dead woman in the bathtub in Room 217. In Part Four, Danny continues to be tormented by monstrous topiary animals and the ghost of a dead child on an outdoor playground. Unfortunately, his parents refuse to believe (or admit believing) in the existence of ghosts, so Danny must use his psychic powers to summon Dick Hallorann back to the hotel.

In Part Five, as Hallorann makes his long and winding way back to The Overlook, Jack tries to murder his wife and son. It's not entirely clear whether he has become possessed by the ghosts of the Overlook or whether he merely succumbed to his own violent impulses. In a 1980 interview, the author offered this ambiguous explanation: "People ask, 'Is it a ghost story or is it just this guy's mind?' Of course it is a ghost story, because Jack Torrance himself is a haunted house. He's haunted by his father. […] It's just a case of however you want to define 'haunted,' ok?" (Kilgore 1980). Either way, *The Shining* is a gothic narrative about "sins of the fathers" and cycles of violence. The hotel acts as a recording device, endlessly replaying past tragedies.

King says he did not *plan* to characterize Jack as a desperate alcoholic, suggesting that the character grew at least partly out of his subconscious mind. As the Overlook Hotel mirrors Jack Torrance's "ghosts," so *The Shining* reflects the author's private demons. King has confessed that he unconsciously wrote the novel about his own struggles as a writer, father, and closeted alcoholic in the years before he published his first novel. In a 1980 essay, he said, "I seemed to be back in that trailer in Hermon, Maine, with no company but the buzzing sound of the snowmobiles and my own fears—fears that my chance to be a writer had come and gone, fears that I had gotten into a teaching job that was completely wrong for me, fears most of all that my marriage was edging onto marshy ground and that there might be quicksand anyplace ahead" (King: "On Becoming" 1980). A few years later, King added an even darker confession about that time in his life: "I loved my wife and kids, but as the pressure mounted, I was beginning to have ambivalent feelings about them, too. On the one hand, I wanted nothing more than to provide for them and protect them—but at the same time, unprepared as I was for the rigors of fatherhood, I was also experiencing a range of nasty

emotions from resentment to anger to occasionally outright hate, even surges of mental violence that, thank God, I was able to suppress" (Norden 1983). In 1997, the author concluded, "In a sense, I wrote *The Shining* out of just trying to understand my own feelings. I think any writer starts there, really" (Beahm 1997).

King's depiction of Jack Torrance as a man overwhelmed by adult responsibilities and financial woes is reminiscent of another modern-day ghost story, Robert Marasco's *Burnt Offerings* (1973). That novel revolves around a nervous schoolteacher named Ben Rolfe, who is quietly suffering through a mid-life crisis when his wife Marian volunteers their family as summer caretakers of a huge, ramshackle estate house on the end of Long Island. Over the summer, Ben succumbs to self-pity and unconsciously tries to drown his 8-year-old son in a pool on the property, while Marian obsesses over the house itself. In the end, each family member becomes a permanent resident of the house, and the house—which was sad and dilapidated when the Rolfes first arrived—is magically restored to its former glory.

According to biographer George Beahm, King's editor Bill Thompson "wasn't terribly enthusiastic" about *The Shining* because of similarities to Marasco's novel (Beahm 1991). What Thompson failed to anticipate was how the two books would co-create a new subgenre of haunted house story. Horror writer Stephen Graham Jones has dubbed it the "Hungry House" formula, citing *Burnt Offerings*, *The Shining* and Jay Anson's *The Amityville Horror* as the pioneering examples of stories about haunted houses that consume people instead of driving them away (Jones 2015).

In *The Shining*, Jack becomes even more manic than Ben Rolfe, but King's novel ends on a different note—because, as the author wrote his story, Danny Torrance developed new strengths as a counterpoint to his father's weaknesses. King has said he initially assumed the novel would end—like Marasco's—with the deaths and destruction of the entire family: "The original plan was for them all to die up there and for Danny to become the controlling force of the hotel after he died." King even wrote a draft in which "Jack beat his wife to death with the [roque] mallet and it was blood and brains and everything" (Ketchum 1979).

Ultimately, he decided he couldn't end his story that way because he cared too deeply for Jack's son. If Jack is a fictionalized version of Stephen King

at his worst, then perhaps King regarded Danny as a fictionalized version of his own son Joe. That might explain why the author dedicated the novel to his son, proudly declaring that Joe "shines on." In the end, he not only took pity on Jack's family, but on Jack as well. During one brief moment in which the bad dad's better nature emerges through a fog of supernatural influence, Jack urges Danny to run away from him. This fleeting moment of self-awareness—followed by a moment of self-sacrifice, in which Jack dooms the hotel in order to save his family—makes King's novel classically tragic. Much as the author of *'Salem's Lot* did not surrender to cultural pessimism, the author of *The Shining* does not surrender to despair. Hope is an essential element—perhaps *the* essential element—of Stephen King's worldview.

Sometime later, King added a lengthy prologue and a short epilogue to his five-act structure. The prologue, published in *Whispers* magazine in 1982 under the title "Before the Play," consists of snapshots of the Overlook's history between 1910 and 1958, as well as a brief but harrowing vignette from Jack Torrance's childhood. The epilogue—recently rediscovered and published for the first time in Cemetery Dance's 2016 Illustrated Edition of *The Shining*—is a news log of articles about the destruction of the hotel and the futures of Wendy, Danny, and Dick Hallorann. Al Shockley, the man who invited Jack Torrance to become caretaker of The Overlook, gets the final word. He tells a reporter there are no plans to rebuild the hotel and that The Overlook "has passed from the American scene for good." Famous last words.

By the time Shockley's epitaph was published, Stephen King had become an American legend on par with Johnny Ringo and The Overlook Hotel had been immortalized on film.

Development Hell (Oral History)

STEPHEN KING: A woman named Mary Lea Johnson, the Band-Aid heiress, formed a group of people and they bought [the film adaptation rights to *The Shining*] and were going to do it. It would probably have ended up being a Producer Circle / Lew Grade production, like THE BOYS FROM BRAZIL or RAISE THE TITANIC! (Jones 2002)

STEPHEN KING: With that one, under contract, I had a screenplay and a rewrite. (Chute 1979)

According to Rocky Wood's book Stephen King: Uncollected, Unpublished, *"King wrote a 132-page, 369-scene screenplay for a movie-length production of THE SHINING." Until recently, that script was part of the King Literary Papers collection at the Raymond H. Fogler Library in Orono, Maine. Wood cites King aficionado Denis Gatiatullin as saying that the script is dated October 7, 1977.*

In his book Stephen King Goes to Hollywood*, Jeff Conner writes, "According to King, his screenplay departed from his novel by concentrating on the Overlook's legacy of evil and skipping Jack Torrance's job interview and his family life in Boulder."*

In Stanley Kubrick: A Biography*, John Baxter writes that King's script revolved around six-year-old Danny Torrance as the main character, while emphasizing the "essential decency" of Jack Torrance and placing the blame for his violent acts on the Overlook Hotel and its topiary monsters.*

STEPHEN KING: It was pegged a lot more to the history of the hotel because I was really interested in the idea that an evil place calls evil men—which is a line from *'Salem's Lot*. The screenplay that I wrote begins with total blackness on screen and the sounds of people talking. It turns out that these are Mafia hit

men, and there are shotgun flashes and screams. Then this voice says, "Get his balls." There's another scream, then you see the hotel. (Gagne 1980)

Rocky Wood proclaims King's script "very faithful to the novel," noting only a few minor changes to the story: "the Woman in Room 217 is not named" (in the novel she is identified as Lorraine Massey), "Danny's imaginary playmate, Tony (actually a projected older version of himself) is not included," and "Al Shockley, Jack's recovering alcoholic friend who got him the job at the Overlook, is also deleted." Although Wood does not offer any additional details about King's 1977 adaptation of THE SHINING, his book does include a detailed synopsis of an earlier Stephen King screenplay, a "very competent" adaptation of Ray Bradbury's novel Something Wicked This Way Comes*, which King reportedly wrote as a tune-up for THE SHINING.*

STEPHEN KING: I think the Bradbury was easier, because I felt more divorced from the source material. […] I'll tell you what it was like [adapting *The Shining*]: You know that sliced bologna that you get at the supermarket? Imagine that package of bologna with five slices in it; what I did was just peel off the top two slices, and they were my screenplay. The rest of it was all underneath, it was all what they thought. (Chute 1979)

STEPHEN KING: For me, the whole screenwriting deal has always been easier in some ways than the novel writing. Because I don't get stuck in people's thoughts and motivations. Everything has to be out, where the camera can see it…. [Richard] Matheson is right: Movies are exterior, books are interior. (Garris: *#54* 2019)

STEPHEN KING: [The producers of THE SHINING] didn't want a lot of flashbacks, which would have been the obvious way. I did it by playing up some of the physical mannerisms, as [Jack Torrance] began to get more and more uptight, always wiping his lips or getting very nervous and jumpy about things. The two flashbacks they agreed to were to the time when he broke his son's arm,

and a couple of conversations about the way things had been. […] While I was working on it, Producer's Circle just turned around and sold the book to Warner Bros., who had Stanley Kubrick in mind. (Chute 1979)

STANLEY KUBRICK: *The Shining* I found very compulsive reading, and I thought the plot, ideas, and structure were much more imaginative than anything I've ever read in the genre. (Foix 1980)

STEPHEN KING: I heard a story from a Warner Bros. flack that's kind of amusing. He said that the secretary in Kubrick's office got used to this steady "THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!" from the inner office—which was Kubrick picking up books, reading about forty pages, and then throwing them against the wall. He was really looking for a property. One day, along about ten o'clock, the thumps stopped coming. […] She went in, and he was reading *The Shining*. (Stewart 3/1980)

STANLEY KUBRICK: I think that the best plot is no apparent plot. I like a slow start, the start that gets under the audience's skin and involves them so that they can appreciate grace notes and soft tones and don't have to be pounded over the head with plot points and suspense hooks. (Kubrick: "Notes" 1960)

STANLEY KUBRICK: It seemed to strike an extraordinary balance between the psychological and the supernatural in such a way as to lead you to think that the supernatural would eventually be explained by the psychological: "Jack must be imagining these things because he's crazy." This allowed you to suspend your doubt of the supernatural until you were so thoroughly into the story that you could accept it almost without noticing. (Ciment 1982)

STEPHEN KING: I was a huge fan [of Stanley Kubrick], like most of the people in my generation. I was a "head" in the 60s. I dropped a lot of acid, did a lot of peyote, got stoned, went to see 2001. But beyond that, I was a huge fan of the black-and-white films, PATHS OF GLORY, THE KILLING… terrific filmmaker.

I was thrilled with the idea that he was going to make my book into a film. (Timpone 2004)

On February 9, 1977, The New York Times *announced that Stanley Kubrick and Jack Nicholson would team up to make THE SHINING.*

STANLEY KUBRICK: To a considerable degree I cast the film while reading the novel; who else but Jack Nicholson could play the father? (Hofsess 1980)

STEPHEN KING: I had someone like Martin Sheen in mind. But nobody will talk about that sort of thing in preproduction. What they want to talk about is someone who's bankable—and Nicholson is that. (Christensen 1979)

BILL THOMPSON (Stephen King's book editor): [The producers] said, "Listen, Steve, we've got Jack Nicholson, but we can't afford him unless you take off 1%." They wanted to give Steve 4% instead of the 5% they had originally promised him. Steve asked me, "What do you think?" […] *What a parlay, Kubrick and Nicholson!* I said, "Take it! Take it!" (Sechrest 2018)

JACK NICHOLSON: Stanley and I only had a couple of discussions about the book. The only thing we disagreed about was I wanted the sexuality of the character in there as well. (Pierce 2009)

STEPHEN KING: I had a discussion with him beforehand. He said, "Stephen, Stanley Kubrick here. Don't you agree that all stories of ghosts are fundamentally optimistic? […] If there are ghosts, it means that we survive death—and that's fundamentally an optimistic view, isn't it?" And I said, "Well, Mr. Kubrick, what about Hell?" And there was a long pause on the telephone line and he said in a very stiff and very different tone, "I don't believe in Hell." (Bouzreau 2011)



Heeeeere's Jack Nicholson, as murderous Jack Torrance in THE SHINING (Warner Bros., 1980)