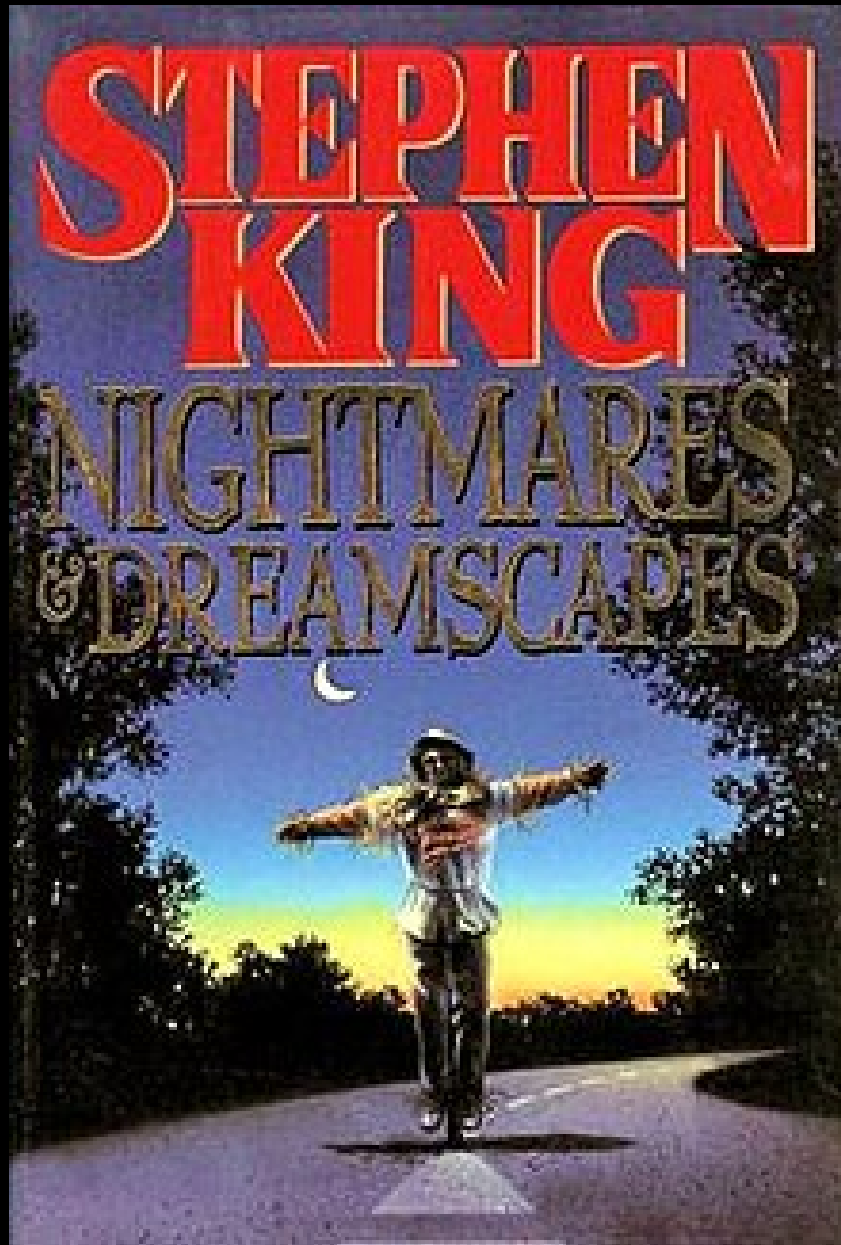


# Emulation Handbook:

## Stephen King



"Nightmares and Dreamscapes" is one of Stephen King's many story collections. There are 23 short stories, ranging from short to long, that are all of varying psychological complexity. Each of the stories has its own plot, yet there are overlapping themes that appear.

# Point of View and Narration Style

## What's happening?

Throughout the story "The Moving Finger," the narrator mentions the main character's, Howard's, obsession with the show Jeopardy! Although the point of view in the story is in third person, we can see the downward spiral of Howard's mental state from the outside. The narrator is omniscient, yet still shows the reader enough for them to infer Howard's thoughts.

## Why is it happening?

Because the story is so focused on Howard's sanity and he finds a dismembered, living finger in his bathroom, the narrator needs to give the reader a feel for what's going on in his head. King could have decided to make it so the reader could see inside Howard's mind, but instead we see the result. Throughout the story, Howard struggles with his marriage and not having all the answers to life's questions. He watches Jeopardy! because it's something he has answers to. He references it in his current situation multiple times as he begins to unravel. This finger pushes him to the edge when he can't get rid of it, which gives him the opportunity to use Jeopardy! as a way of coping. Overall, this strategy sets up the whole story's plot and navigation.

Something suddenly splashed inside the closed toilet. Howard's eyes shifted in that direction. So did Officer O'Bannion's. The splash came again. It sounded as if a trout had jumped in there.

"No, I most definitely *wouldn't* use the toilet," Howard said. "I'd hold it, if I were you, Officer. I'd hold it just as long as I possibly could, and then use the alley beside the building."

O'Bannion shivered.

*Get hold of yourself, boyo*, he told himself sternly. *You get hold of yourself, or you'll wind up as nutty as this guy.*

He got up to check the toilet.

"Bad idea," Howard said. "A *really* bad idea."

"What exactly happened in here, Mr. Mitla?" O'Bannion asked. "And what have you stored in the toilet?"

"What happened? It was like . . . like . . ." Howard trailed off, and then began to smile. It was a relieved smile . . . but his eyes kept creeping back to the closed lid of the toilet. "It was like *Jeopardy*," he said. "In fact, it was like *Final Jeopardy*. The category is The Inexplicable. The Final Jeopardy answer is, 'Because they can.' Do you know what the Final Jeopardy question is, Officer?"

Fascinated, unable to take his eyes from Howard's, Officer O'Bannion shook his head.

"The Final Jeopardy question," Howard said in a voice that was cracked and roughened from screaming, "is: 'Why do terrible things sometimes happen to the nicest people?' *That's* the Final Jeopardy question. It's all going to take a lot of thought. But I have plenty of time. As long as I stay away from the . . . the holes."

The splash came again. It was heavier this time. The vomitous toilet seat bumped sharply up and down. Officer O'Bannion got up, walked over, and bent down. Howard looked at him with some interest.

"Final Jeopardy, Officer," said Howard Mitla. "How much do you wish to wager?"

O'Bannion thought about it for a moment . . . then grasped the toilet seat and wagered it all.

(300-301), The Moving Finger

## How does it affect the reader?

The way Howard's experience is provided allows the reader an unsettling feeling from his unpredictability. We don't know what Howard is thinking all the time, but we can guess based on his behavior. If the story was in first person, or if the narrator could see into Howard's mind all the time, we'd have too much information. Even though more information on Howard's mental state would make him more predictable, it would take away the element of fear that Stephen King provides. In this portion of text, the story comes to a close. Howard makes another Jeopardy! analogy and involves the policeman. He gives the answer to the "Final Jeopardy! Question," then the answer. Since we have to pick apart what might be going on in Howard's and the officer's heads, we forget about the status of the finger. This distraction tactic distracts us long enough for King to give another unsettling surprise, on top of Howard falling apart. After the finger causes a disturbance in the toilet and the police officer approaches it, Howard asks, "How much do you wish to wager?" With that as the final line, the reader is left not completely satisfied and still wishing for an explanation. This tactic is what makes a good thriller, which King carries out fabulously.

# Time Jumps

"Take me away, please," Miss Sidley said, softly and tonelessly, to no one in particular.

And so they took her away. Buddy Jenkins watched the children watch her go, their eyes wide and empty, but somehow deep. One smiled, and another put his fingers in his mouth slyly. Two little girls clutched each other and giggled.

That night Miss Sidley cut her throat with a bit of broken mirror-glass, and after that Buddy Jenkins began to watch the children more and more. In the end, he was hardly able to take his eyes off them.

(108), Suffer the Little Children

## What's happening?

In the last bit of the story, "Suffer the Little Children," King uses time jumps. The story is short, and moves quickly from school, to court days later, when the main character is trying to work again, and then lastly to last day shown the main character kills herself. The story isn't told including every detail of what happened, but gives pieces of it in chronological order.

## Why is it happening?

Since people usually lose their minds over a long period of time, there's often the psychological buildup. In this story, a teacher notices sinister smiles coming from her students. After going crazy over it for a while, she murders her students. After she has recovered slightly from the mental and emotional trauma she endured, she's allowed to work with children again, only to see the smiles and take her life. King chose to make this a short story, so we didn't necessarily have the space to show everything that happened. Doing this, there are mile markers in our main character's journey through mental degradation needed that make the story cohesive. King uses time jumps to have a beginning-middle-end format that doesn't necessarily include all details or even how much time has passed.

## How does it affect the reader?

Because of the use of time jumps, the reader has to figure out how much time has passed, and how long it took for this woman to lose her mind. This is the scariest part because King didn't really need to create creepy scenes in order to unsettle us. In this case, we are scaring ourselves. The questions he leaves us with have disturbing answers, which makes this the kind of story you can't stop thinking about. The key here is that the reader doesn't know everything, and that's what makes it such a good thrill. All King does is manipulate how we feel, and our minds do the rest. Fear is universal, and we push what scares us out of mind. When someone like King triggers us to let it out, where's the fear coming from? The story? Or ourselves?

# Sentence Structure

"She sat where she was, frozen, as he got up and came toward her, leaving black, kelpy tracks on the carpet, fingers reaching. He stank of salt and fathoms. His hands stretched."

(406), Home Delivery

## What's happening?

The author uses these sentences to create suspense for the reader. As you can see in the sentences provided, there is a long sentence that uses commas to draw out a single movement, followed by two shorter sentences that pauses the scene with even more detail without moving forward.

## Why is it happening?

In the story, "Home Delivery," a young woman gets pregnant during the zombie apocalypse. Her baby-daddy, Jack, turns into a zombie, and she has to kill him. In the scene in which these sentences are found, he is trying to attack her, and she has no choice but to act upon it. This provides rising action, but slowly enough to make the moment important.

## How does it affect the reader?

Sentence structure helps put emphasis on the rising action. Jack was previously described in his human form, and we learned about his relationship with the main character, so now it is heart wrenching to see him in this form. If King had sped through the scene without varying sentence structure or the use of commas, then the moment would not have been so climatic. By doing so, the reader has more time to feel sorry for the main character and let go of Jack. This way, King now has the control to manipulate the reader's feelings for the characters by influencing the way they must interpret the text given. The sentence variation and commas create timing and rhythm that is no longer left up to the reader, therefore forcing them into whatever King's intended reaction is.



## My Emulation: "Beneath"

The smell of permanent markers in the basement was pungent. With his back against the mildewy concrete wall, the child grew lightheaded from all the uncapped Sharpies on the floor and the lack of ventilation.

The steel door was covered in scratches stained brown and had a dented knob. The shaking of the door was not unlike Emmer's shivers.

The walls were filled to maximum capacity with his nightmares and he was running out of ink to draw them with. He needed more markers.

They were of wolves, mostly, though he had never seen one. As a child his parents would tell him about them. He knew they were dark, snarling creatures with horrific intentions. They would rip your skin to pieces. Emmer remembered the stories of wolves that were on the other side of that door, feared that they could smell him. He feared the fact that the handle had no lock. At any moment, they could burst through. Emmer never dared touch the knob, at least, not until he was sixteen.

On a day not long after his birthday, which he didn't know existed, Emmer stood on his deformed feet, feeling around with his scabby hands. He couldn't remember why his hands were so raw, but his feet had never had all their toes and slight arches. They were twisted and thin and battered to bits, as if someone had been gnawing on them.

He was getting desperate.

He brought himself closer to the door and placed his fingers around the knob.

Shake, shake, and then a bang from the other side. Emmer couldn't decide if the softer sounds he heard were scratches or whimpers.

Didn't matter. He had all the time in the world and none of the life required to live.

This was it.

He turned the knob ever so gently, as slowly as anyone could, and opened the door just a crack.

There was no movement.

He put his arm out, felt around a bit.

A hand covered in scabs and bloody fingernails clutched his wrist.

The smell of Sharpies hit him for the first time in forever.

He was the last of them.

# Analysis of "Beneath"

## Point of View and Narration Style

I used point of view to the same advantages that King used them. I combined this with the style of narration as well. The way I used it made it so the reader could only have some of what was going on in Emmer's head, but only through what they could infer from his behavior. This way, the reader, like in King's stories, has more questions than answers by the end. Not only does this make them want to read more, but it spooks them for longer than just when they finish reading.

## Time Jumps

Since Emmer spent his whole life in the basement, I didn't want to include every part. That would take longer than a short story has to offer, and it would also answer too many questions, taking away the element of mystery. The story starts with Emmer as a toddler, then jumps to a sort of flashback about his time as a child, then to the present where he was sixteen. It gives the reader necessary information, but makes them wonder about the gaps of time in between and what was happening then and why. This adds to the element of discomfort and wonder that I was aiming for.

## Sentence Structure

In my scene I utilized varying sentence length. In descriptive sentences, I tried combining them or making them longer with commas. Near, the end, I had shorter sentences that I broke up the story with for added suspense. If all my sentences were the same length, I would lose the reader's interest and it wouldn't be so creepy. It also reflects the mood in the scene as well. In more relaxed parts, I used longer sentences to avoid overusing short ones. Unlike King, I used the short and long contrast all over the scene, and not just for a specific image. In the example I used, it was creating contrast and suspense for a single image, where I tried spreading out over a whole section.

## About the Authors



### Stephen King

King was born in Maine and has been an author since 1967. He writes mostly horror and supernatural fiction, and he is a pro at psychological thrillers. He has published 54 novels and over 200 short stories, many of which have won awards and nominations. Most of his stories are set in Maine. Many of his books have been turned into movies, as well as TV shows. King is married to another novelist who he lives with in Maine. He continues to write and publish his books, including *Mr. Mercedes*, which was released in 2014.



### Serenity Baruzzini

Serenity is a high school student in Philadelphia. Many of her stories have been published in magazines and in online publications. She writes short stories and poetry, as well as essays on her own experiences. She wrote a lot with the non-profit Mighty Writers when she was younger, but recently branched off to continue her journey on her own. When she isn't writing or reading Stephen King's work, you can probably find her at her school's robotics club. She is not only an aspiring author, but an aspiring engineer as well. You can read more of her writing at

<https://medium.com/@serenitybaruzzini>