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Doctor Sleep: A Novel



Synopsis

Audie Award Winner, Fiction, 2014 Audie Award Nominee, Solo Narration - Male, 2014 Stephen King returns to the characters and territory of one of his most popular novels ever, *The Shining*, in this instantly riveting novel about the now middle-aged Dan Torrance (the boy protagonist of *The Shining*) and the very special 12-year-old girl he must save from a tribe of murderous paranormals. 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 married to their RVs. But as Dan Torrance knows, and spunky 12-year-old Abra Stone learns, The True Knot are quasi-immortal, living off the "steam" that children with the "shining" produce when they are slowly tortured to death. Haunted by the inhabitants of the Overlook Hotel where he spent one horrific childhood year, Dan has been drifting for decades, desperate to shed his father's legacy of despair, alcoholism, and violence. Finally, he settles in a New Hampshire town, an AA community that sustains him, and a job at a nursing home 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. This is an epic war between good and evil, a gory, glorious story that will thrill the millions of hyper-devoted fans of *The Shining* and wildly satisfy anyone new to the territory of this icon in the King canon.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The return-to-form King displayed with 11/22/63 and the novella JOYLAND continues for the most part with King's long-awaited 36-years-later sequel to 1977's THE SHINING. Picking up only a few years after the conclusion of events in THE SHINING, the prologue features one of the most memorable apparitions from The Overlook making a welcome return "haunting". From there, the novel jumps ahead a couple of decades, picking up with Danny at his lowest point in his late twenties before coursing ahead several more years. The pacing is a little disjointed at times and I was disappointed that some of Dan's arguably more compelling years (his teenage years) - and characters such as Wendy and Dick Hallorann - are never really explored to the extent or depth I had hoped they would be. A little more detail and padding here would have been welcome.

However, King has often been criticized for his meandering, overlong style so many readers may relish this slightly more concise style. The constant references throughout to even minor events in THE SHINING will have most readers inevitably comparing it to the earlier book (throwbacks to "REDRUM" and many other references abound). While DOCTOR SLEEP does work as a stand-alone novel, it works best as a sequel. There are two main threads to this novel: the exploration and expansion of the character of the now adult 'Doc', as he battles with his demons (alcoholism, his past, and his shining ability); and the new story and characters such as Abra, Chetta, Lucy, Doctor John, Dave, and The True Knot. The new characters, especially Abra, are well drawn but the villains come across as a little hammy and the overall plot pales in comparison to Dan's inner ruminations. The book's strongest point is the characterization of the original character and his expansion, with the main plot (new characters, new villains) being somewhat weaker but serviceable. As is typical with many King novels, the ending is a bit of a letdown - (small spoiler) it's not bad but it is a little predictable and the final showdown is rushed with its infamous Colorado setting underused. King says that this novel is a "return to balls-to-the-wall, keep-the-lights-on scary horror" and eerie early scenes in the prologue and when Dan's Shining returns with a bang in Teenytown seem to promise this, but it never really manifests, and overall the novel is not at all scary or even particularly creepy. Unfortunately, while it is suspenseful, much of the tale is just not as compelling or terrifying as it could have been. It's more of a supernatural adventure than a horror - an enjoyable and entertaining adventure for the most part that also serves as a poignant story of redemption, exploring themes such as mortality, family, and second chances. Due to high expectations, you may be disappointed - don't expect a direct sequel to THE SHINING, but view it more as a continuation of the character of Dan with a new story and lots of references to the original novel. Don't expect a horror novel either - view this as more of a supernatural adventure crossed with a poignant story of redemption. It's far from perfect (few sequels are) and it's not better than the

original, but it does continue the tale of Dan Torrance in an effective and heartfelt manner, features a good (though not great) premise, and introduces some interesting new characters, while also being respectful of and paying homage to its roots. Despite its flaws, DOCTOR SLEEP is a solid work.

[THIS REVIEW CONTAINS SOME SPOILERS]After reading an author for as many years as I've read King, I have become accustomed somewhat to the writer's habits and other signature moves to the point where I can almost predict them. And when those habits and signatures aren't there, when a writer you've read for years is off his or her game, it becomes as palpable on the brain as the lack of salt feels almost injurious to a gourmet's palate. That's how I felt when I read Doctor Sleep, the sequel to King's masterpiece to The Shining. I'm almost at pains to call it a sequel, because it feels so utterly separate from the mind and world in which the first book was written that one could easily read this book without having read The Shining and not miss much of a beat, but there is some bridging there between the first two books for those who have read The Shining. That being said, the book started off very strong. Dan Torrance, once known as Danny or "Doc," has grown up and he's wrestling with the alcohol demon, in much the same way his father did, only he has his childhood nightmare at The Overlook as well as his often torturous psychic ability still riding shotgun. He's a bit of a nomad, drifting from town to town after he's burned enough bridges (usually thanks to the antics he gets up to while on a liquor binge) but he tries to make the best of things working as an orderly at various hospice centers where he helps to usher dying patients gently into the afterlife. This whole side of Dan's life is not given a whole lot of gravity or dimension, however, and it left me wondering what exactly he does for these people that is so special. That was my first cue that King was not entirely on his game here, but I'll get to that in a minute. At any rate, Dan finds a home in Frazier, New Hampshire, a sleepy little town populated by good salt of the earth types that we like immediately. Dan also starts going to AA meetings, and we start to see him climbing out of this black hole he's been living in most of his adult life. As the plot evolves, we met Abra Stone, a girl born with an immense psychic ability that dwarfs what even Dan experienced as a child. She's telekinetic, telepathic, can travel into other people's minds from great distances, and can even leave messages on a blackboard from miles away. The stuff this kid can do is pretty amazing, and as she grows older and starts to interact more with Dan (which is inevitable), I liked getting to know her and her family more. That's one thing I really appreciated about this book. King's signature for developing heartfelt and realistic relationships between his characters is as strong as ever, and it left me wanting more. It is the only thing that kept me reading. Of course there is a third element at

work here, and it is that of the True Knot, a band of psychic vampires who feed off of psychic energy called "steam" rather than blood. They travel the country in bands of RV's looking for their next victims. They are an interesting group, all with carnie names like Rose the Hat, Snakebite Andi, Jimmy Numbers, etc. They have a deep and abiding love for one another, but they are also monsters and child killers and they're desperate for more steam (times have been a little lean of late). After their leader (Rose the Hat) discovers her "white whale" of a steam head in Abra, they are determined to get her and here is where we start getting doses of actual conflict between the three stories King has been building. And here is where things start to go off the rails. King for whatever reason begins to lose interest in his story. Perhaps it's because it's more plot-driven than a lot of his work, but when it came time for Abra, Dan, and company to face off against the True Knot, he pulled so many punches that he was in negative punch territory by the time it was over. Not once did I feel like Abra and Dan were in any sort of trouble, and that was the first problem. It's hard to thrill people when you don't get a sense of peril, and it is an odd mark to make against King, who normally (and with glee) will inflict pain and suffering upon his protagonists in order to elicit emotion from the reader. Second, when it came time for Abra to truly interact with her main adversary (Rose), King more or less pulls her out of the story, placing her halfway across the country from Abra while she sends her surrogates after the girl. I tried to figure out why King would have made this decision, why he seemed to be avoiding conflict rather than running head-on into it like he typically does. I still have no good answers. If he was trying to make it so that Rose grew more and more furious with each loss suffered at Abra's hands so that when the two of them finally did have their showdown, it would be all the more perilous, he failed there too, dispatching the story's enemies with such ease that it was more of an anti-climax. Rose simply was not very scary at all to begin with, and all her power was sucked away by the time we reached the battleground. Abra was so strong that she had no one who could match her power. Everything about that climax felt tacked on. Everything rushed. It was almost like King couldn't wait to get this story done so he could move on to something more interesting. Maybe sequels just aren't his thing. And that's what this book feels like by the end, like the obligatory sort of thing people write because other people want it, not because the author really wanted to write it. I know King still has magic in him. He blew me away with *Joyland* and *11/22/63* remains a modern masterpiece for him. But this book, like the steam it features between its pages, is thin and ultimately forgettable.

Firstly - kudos to Mr King. As one of his early works *The Shining* has a mythical status of a classic from an era of horror that once was. Penning a sequel decades later is a challenge I don't envy. So

the inevitable comparison: Dr Sleep is much more modern than The Shining, a sort of supernatural adventure, coming of age, redemption tale mixed into one. Where The Shining was the quintessential insanity inducing haunted hotel story, Dr Sleep reads more like a superhero story rather than an out and out horror. In common both tales are heavy on the gross style of scares (although that could be said about almost all Stephen King novels) and hinge strongly on the theme of violence caused by unnaturally induced insanity. The beginning of Dr Sleep was by far the strongest part of the book. King initially brings us up to speed on Dan Torrance, then introduces Abra as a next generation 'Shiner.' While the first few chapters lack a sense of direction and tension, just the vivid experiences of Dan's recovery and Abra's struggling family are enough to carry the novel, and when the True Knot are introduced they are freaking creepy. Somewhere about the middle of the book things started to stagnate, Dan's alcoholism becomes more of a token flaw as opposed to an important part of the story. Abra's difficulties with her psychic power are largely tamed, and the conclusion feels like the end of a lesser B grade action flick, it seems Mr King was too timid to hit us with a tragic or at least traumatizing finale and let things end without surprise or unfortunately any excitement. In total Dr Sleep is a good book, but will likely be remembered as just another Stephen King book rather than an equally classic piece as its predecessor.

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