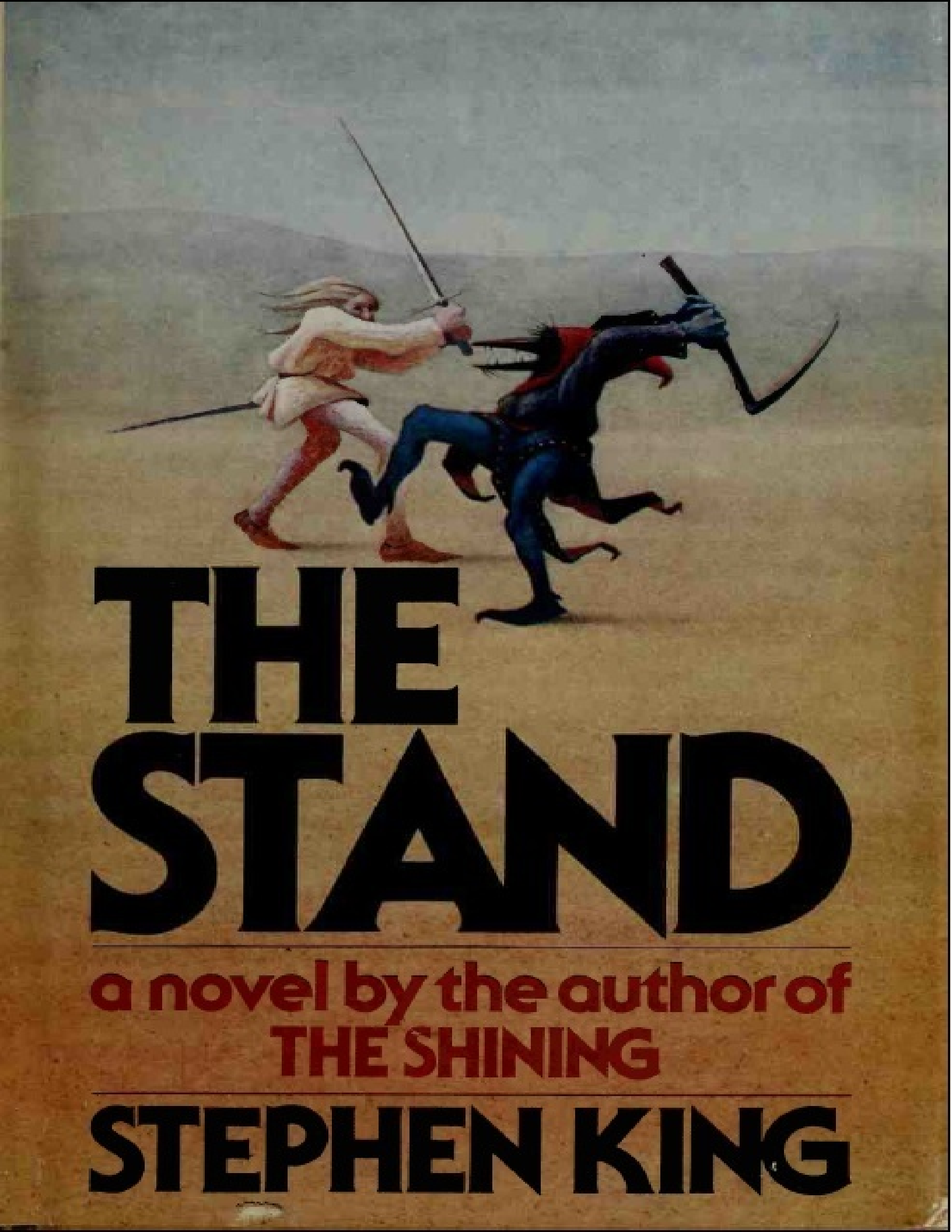

THE STAND

a novel by the author of
THE SHINING

STEPHEN KING

THE STAND

By Stephen King

DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, INC., GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK

[THE COMPLETELY RESTORED, *ORIGINAL*, DEFTLY EDITED, UNBLOATED, CLASSIC NOVEL.]

Author's Note

This is a work of fiction. Many of the events occur in real places, and with these places I have taken the liberty of changing them to whatever degree best suited the course of my story. This is a monstrous impertinence, and that is as good a definition of the word "novel" as any.

Special thanks are due to Russell Dorr (P.A.) and Dr. Richard Herman, both of the Bridgton Family Medical Center, who answered my questions about the nature of the flu, and its peculiar way of mutating every two years or so, and to Susan Artz Manning of Castine, who proofed the original manuscript.

Most thanks of all to Bill Thompson and Betty Prashker, who made this book happen in the best way.

S.K.

For my wife Tabitha: This dark chest of wonders.

Outside the street's on fire

In a real death waltz

Between what’s flesh and what’s fantasy

And the poets down here

Don’t write nothing at all

They just stand back and let it all be

And in the quick of the night

They reach for their moment

And try to make an honest stand . . .

—Bruce Springsteen

. . . And it was clear she couldn’t go on,

The door was opened and the wind appeared,

The candles blew and then disappeared,

The curtains flew and then *he* appeared,

Said, “Don’t be afraid,

Come on, Mary,”

And she had no fear

And she ran to him

And they started to fly . . .

She had taken his hand . . .

Come on, Mary,

Don’t fear the reaper . . .

—Blue Oyster Cult

Well the deputy walks on hard nails

And the preacher rides a mount

But nothing really matters much,

It’s doom alone that counts

And the one-eyed undertaker, he blows a futile horn

“Come in,” she said,

“I’ll give ya Shelter from the storm.”

—Bob Dylan

BOOK I CAPTAIN TRIP

June 16 - July 4,1980

“I called the doctor on the telephone,

Said doctor, doctor, please,

I got this feeling, rocking and reeling,

Tell me, what can it be?

Is it some new disease?”

—The Sylvers

“Baby, can you dig your man?

He’s a righteous man,

Baby, can you dig your man?”

—Larry Underwood

CHAPTER 1

Hapscomb’s Texaco sat on US 93 just north of Amette, a pissant four-street burg about 110 miles from Houston. Tonight the regulars were there, sitting by the cash register, drinking beer, talking idly, watching the bugs fly into the big lighted sign.

It was Bill Hapscomb’s station, so the others deferred to him even though he was a pure fool. They would have expected the same deferral if they had been gathered together in one of their business establishments. Except they

had none. In Amette it was hard times. In 1970 the town had had two industries, a factory that made paper products (for picnics and barbecues, mostly), and a plant that made electronic calculators. Now the paper factory was shut down and the calculator plant was ailing—they could make them a lot cheaper in Taiwan, it turned out, just like those little portable TVs and transistor radios.

Norman Bruett and Tommy Wannamaker, who had both worked in the paper factory, were on relief, having run out of unemployment some time ago. Henry Carmichael and Stu Redman both worked at the calculator plant but rarely got more than thirty hours a week. Victor Palfrey was retired and smoked stinking home-rolled cigarettes, which were all he could afford.

“Now what I say is this,” Hap told them, putting his hands on his knees and leaning forward. “They just gotta say screw this inflation shit. Screw this national debt shit. We got the presses and we got the paper. We’re gonna run off fifty million thousand-dollar bills and hump them right the Christ into circulation.”

Palfrey, who had been a machinist until 1974, was the only one present with sufficient self-respect to point out Hap’s most obvious damfool statements. Now, rolling another of his shitty-smelling cigarettes, he said: “That wouldn’t get us nowhere. If they do that, it’l be just like Richmond in the last two years of the States War. In those days, when you wanted a piece of gingerbread, you gave the baker a Confederate dollar, he’d put it on the gingerbread, and cut out a piece just that size. Money’s just paper, you know.”

“I know some people that don’t agree with you,” Hap said sourly. He picked up a greasy red plastic paper-holder from his desk. “I owe these people. And they’re starting to get pretty itchy about it.”

Stu Redman, who was perhaps the quietest man in Amette, was sitting in one of the cracked plastic Woolco chairs, a can of Pabst in his hand, looking out the big service station window at 93. Stu knew about poor. He had grown up that way right here in town, the son of a dentist who had died when Stu was seven, leaving his wife and two other children besides Stu.

His mother had gotten work at the Redball Truck Stop just outside of Amette—Stu could have seen it from where he sat right now if it hadn't burned down in 1969. It had been enough to keep the four of them eating, but that was all. At the age of nine, Stu had gone to work, first for Rog Tucker, who owned the Red Ball, helping to unload trucks after school for thirty-five cents an hour, and then at the stockyards in the neighboring town of Braintree, lying about his age to get twenty backbreaking hours of labor a week at the minimum wage.

Now, listening to Hap and Vic Palfrey argue on about money and the mysterious way it had of drying up, he thought about the way his hands had bled at first from pulling the endless handtrucks of hides and guts. He had tried to keep that from his mother, but she had seen, less than a week after he started. She wept over them a little, and she hadn't been a woman who wept easily. But she hadn't asked him to quit the job. She knew what the situation was. She was a realist.

Some of the silence in him came from the fact that he had never had friends, or the time for them. There was school, and there was work. His youngest brother, Dev, had died of pneumonia the year he began at the yards, and Stu had never quite gotten over that. Guilt, he supposed. He had loved Dev the best ... but his passing had also meant there was one less mouth to feed.

In high school he had found football, and that was something his mother had encouraged even though it cut into his work hours. "You play," she said. "'If you got a ticket out of here, it's football, Stuart. You play. Remember Eddie Warfield." Eddie Warfield was a local hero. He had come from a family even poorer than Stu's own, had covered himself with glory as quarterback of the regional high school team, had gone on to Texas A&M with an athletic scholarship, and had played for ten years with the Green Bay Packers, mostly as a second-string quarterback but on several memorable occasions as the starter. Eddie now owned a string of fast-food restaurants across the West and Southwest, and in Amette he was an enduring figure of myth. In Amette, when you said "success," you meant Eddie Warfield.

Stu was no quarterback, and he was no Eddie Warfield. But it did seem to him as he began his junior year in high school that there was at least a fighting chance for him to get a small athletic scholarship . . . and then there were work-study programs, and the school's guidance counselor had told him about the NDEA loan program.

Then his mother had gotten sick, had become unable to work. It was cancer. Two months before he graduated from high school, she had died, leaving Stu and his brother Bryce to support. Stu had turned down the athletic scholarship and had gone to work in the calculator factory. And finally it was Bryce, three years' Stu junior, who had made out. He was now in Minnesota, a systems analyst for IBM. He didn't write often, and the last time he had seen Bryce was at the funeral, after Stu's wife had died—died of exactly the same sort of cancer that had killed his mother. He thought that Bryce might have his own guilt to carry . . . and that Bryce might be a little ashamed of the fact that his brother had turned into just another good old boy in a dying Texas town, spending his days doing time in the calculator plant, and his nights either down at Hap's or over at the Indian Head drinking Lone Star beer.

The marriage had been the best time, and it had only lasted eighteen months. The womb of his young wife had borne a single dark and malignant child. That had been three years ago. Since, he had thought of leaving Amette, searching for something better, but smalltown inertia held him—the low siren song of familiar places and familiar faces. He was well liked in Amette, and Vic Palfrey had once paid him the ultimate compliment of calling him "Old-time tough."

As Vic and Hap chewed it out there was still a little dusk left in the sky, but the land was in shadow. Cars didn't go by on 93 much now, which was one reason Hap had so many unpaid bills. But there was a car coming now, Stu saw.

It was still a quarter of a mile distant, the day's last light putting a dusty shine on what little chrome was left to it. Stu's eyes were sharp and he made it as a very old Chevrolet, '59 or '60. A Chevy, no lights on, doing no more than fifteen miles an hour, weaving all over the road. No one had seen it yet but him.

“Now let’s say you got a mortgage payment on this station,” Vic Palfrey was saying, “and let’s say it’s fifty dollars a month.”

“It’s a hell of a lot more than that.”

“Well, for the sake of argument, let’s say fifty. And let’s say the Federals went ahead and printed you a whole carload of money. Well then those bank people would turn around and want a *hundred* and fifty. You’d be just as poorly off.”

“That’s right,” Henry Carmichael nodded. Hap looked at him, irritated. He happened to know that Hank had gotten in the habit of taking Cokes out of the machine without paying the deposit, and furthermore, Hank *knew* he knew, and if Hank wanted to come in on any side, it ought to be his.

“That ain’t necessarily how it would be,” Hap said weightily from the depths of his ninth-grade education. He went on to explain why.

Stu, who only understood that they were all in a hell of a pinch, turned Hap’s voice down to a meaningless drone and watched the Chevy pitch and yaw its way on up the road. The way it was going Stu didn’t think it was going to make it much further. It crossed the white line and its lefthand tires spumed up dust from the left shoulder. Now it lurched back, held its own lane briefly, then nearly pitched off into the ditch. Then, as if the driver had picked out the big lighted Texaco station sign as a beacon, it arrowed toward the tarmac like a projectile whose velocity is very nearly spent. Stu could hear the wornout thump of its engine now, the steady gurgle-and-wheeze of a dying carb and a loose set of valves. It missed the lower entrance and bumped up over the curb. The fluorescent bars over the pumps were reflecting off the Chevy’s dirt-streaked windshield so it was hard to see what was inside, but Stu saw the vague shape of the driver roll loosely with the bump. The car showed no sign of slowing from its relentless fifteen.

“So I say with more money in circulation you’d be—”

“Better turn off your pumps, Hap,” Stu said mildly.

“The pumps? What?”

Norm Bruett had turned to look out the window. “Christ on a pony,” he said.

Stu got out of his chair, leaned over Tommy Wannamaker and Hank Carmichael, and flicked off all eight switches at once, four with each hand. So he was the only one who didn’t see the Chev as it hit the gas pumps on the upper island and sheared them off.

It plowed into them with a slowness that seemed implacable and somehow grand. Tommy Wannamaker swore in The Indian Head the next day that the taillights never flashed once. The Chevy just kept coming at a steady fifteen or so, like the pace car in the Tournament of Roses parade. The undercarriage screeched over the concrete island, and when the wheels hit it everyone but Stu saw the driver’s head swing limply forward and strike the windshield, starring the glass.

The Chevy jumped like an old dog that had been kicked and plowed away the hi-test pump. It snapped off and rolled away, spilling a few dribbles of gas. The nozzle came unhooked and lay gleaming under the fluorescents.

They all saw the sparks produced by the Chevy’s exhaust pipe grating across the cement, and Hap, who had seen a gas station explosion in Mexico, instinctively shielded his eyes against the fireball he expected. Instead, the Chevy’s rear end flirted around and fell off the pump island on the station side. The front end smashed into the low-lead pump, knocking it off with a hollow *bang.*

Almost deliberately, the Chevrolet finished its 360° turn, hitting the island again, broadside this time. The rear end popped up on the island and knocked the regular gas pump asprawl. And there the Chevy came to rest, trailing its rusty exhaust pipe behind it. It had destroyed all three of the gas pumps on that island nearest the highway. The motor continued to run choppily for a few seconds and then quit. The silence was so loud it was alarming.