

Book Club Kit

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About Stephen King



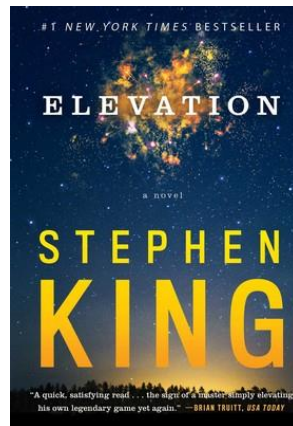
[photograph: Leamage/Corbis via Getty Images]

Stephen King is the author of more than sixty books, all of them worldwide bestsellers. His recent work includes *Fairy Tale*, *Billy Summers*, *If It Bleeds*, *The Institute*, *Elevation*, *The Outsider*, *Sleeping Beauties* (cowritten with his son Owen King), and the Bill Hodges trilogy: *End of Watch*, *Finders Keepers*, and *Mr. Mercedes* (an Edgar Award winner for Best Novel and a television series streaming on Peacock). His novel *11/22/63* was named a top ten book of 2011 by *The New York Times Book Review* and won the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for Mystery/Thriller. His epic works *The Dark Tower*, *It*, *Pet Sematary*, *Doctor Sleep*, and *Firestarter* are the basis for major motion pictures, with *It* now the highest-grossing horror film of all time. He is the recipient of the 2020 Audio Publishers Association Lifetime Achievement Award, the 2018 PEN America Literary Service Award, the 2014 National Medal of Arts, and the 2003 National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. He lives in Bangor, Maine, with his wife, novelist Tabitha King.

Source:

<https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Elevation/Stephen-King/9781982102326>

Synopsis – Elevation



Although Scott Carey doesn't look any different, he's been steadily losing weight. There are a couple of other odd things, too. He weighs the same in his clothes and out of them, no matter how heavy they are. Scott doesn't want to be poked and prodded. He mostly just wants someone else to know, and he trusts Doctor Bob Ellis.

In the small town of Castle Rock, the setting of many of King's most iconic stories, Scott is engaged in a low grade—but escalating—battle with the lesbians next door whose dog regularly drops his business on Scott's lawn. One of the women is friendly; the other, cold as ice. Both are trying to launch a new restaurant, but the people of Castle Rock want no part of a gay married couple, and the place is in trouble. When Scott finally understands the prejudices they face—including his own—he tries to help. Unlikely alliances, the annual foot race, and the mystery of Scott's affliction bring out the best in people who have indulged the worst in themselves and others.

Source: <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Elevation/Stephen-King/9781982102326>

The Guardian Interview about King's 2019 book, *The Institute*

Stephen King: 'I have outlived most of my critics. It gives me great pleasure.'

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/07/stephen-king-interview-the-institute>

Sep. 7, 2019

Xan Brooks

Born in Maine in 1947, Stephen King wrote his first published novel, *Carrie*, in 1974 and has spent the subsequent half-century documenting the monsters and heroes of small-town America. His rogues' gallery of characters runs the gamut from killer clowns and demonic cars to psychotic fans and unhinged populist politicians.

His best-loved books include *The Stand*, *It*, *The Dead Zone* and *Pet Sematary*. King's latest novel, *The Institute*, revolves around a totalitarian boot camp for telekinetic children. The kids check in – but don't check out.

Carrie was published against the backdrop of Watergate, Vietnam and the Patty Hearst kidnapping. Is America a more or less scary place to write about now? The world is a scary place, not just America. We're in the spooky house – on the ghost train, if you prefer – for life. The scares come and go, but everyone likes make-believe monsters to stand in for the real ones.

The Institute is about a concentration camp for children, staffed by implacable factotums. To what extent did Trump's immigration policies affect the book? Trump's immigration policies didn't impact the book, because it was written before that incompetent dumbbell became president. Children are imprisoned and enslaved all over the world. Hopefully, people who read *The Institute* will find a resonant chord with this administration's cruel and racial policies.

You were raised in a working-class Republican household. What would your mother make of today's GOP?

My mother bolted the GOP the last time she voted and cast a ballot for George McGovern. She hated the Vietnam war. I was sworn to secrecy, but feel the statute of limitations on that has run out. In Maine, lots of Republicans are more purple than red. It's how Senator Susan Collins keeps sliding by.

For all the terrors in your work, there's an underlying faith in basic human decency. This suggests you think most people are basically good.

Yes, most people are good. More people are anxious to stop a terrorist attack than to start one. They just don't make the news.

You started out being dismissed by the literary establishment as a lowly peddler of cheap horror. You're now a lauded national treasure. How does it feel to be respectable?

It feels good to be at least semi-respectable. I have outlived most of my most virulent critics. It gives me great pleasure to say that. Does that make me a bad person?

Isn't it also partly because the boundary between literary fiction and genre fiction has become more porous? The old high/low distinction doesn't exist in the same way.

Well, there's still a strange – to me, anyway – and totally subjective line between high culture and low. An aria from *Rigoletto*, *La donna è mobile*, for instance – is high culture. Sympathy for the Devil by the Stones is low. They're both cool, so go figure.

I've heard that you like to write to loud music. Isn't that really distracting?

I'm listening to Fine Young Cannibals [right now]. Soon to be followed by Danny and the Juniors and the Animals. I love rock – the louder the better.

But does the music leave an imprint on a book's tone or pace? Would a chapter written while listening to the Animals, say, differ from a chapter written under the influence of the Ramones?

The music I happen to be listening to can sometimes affect word choice, or cause a new line, but never affects style.

You're astoundingly prolific. What's your feeling about those novelists who spend years crafting and rewriting a novel? Envy at their rigour? Exasperation?

Some writers take years; James Patterson takes a weekend. Every writer is different. I feel that a first draft should take about four months, but that's me. And I go over my work obsessively. Here's another thing – creative life is absurdly short. I want to cram in as much as I can.

Have you ever forced yourself to go slower?

Deliberately go slower? No, never. I've written longhand [*Dreamcatcher*], but poke along and obsessively polish? No. You keep picking a scab, you're gonna make it bleed instead of heal.



King with his son Owen King, also an author, as is his wife, Tabitha King, and their other son, Joe Hill. Photograph: Astrid Stawiarz/Getty Images

You've said your characters sometimes speak in your head to the point where they blot out the real world. That makes writing fiction sound like a close cousin to mental illness...

I don't think writing is a mental illness, but when I'm working and it's going really well, time and the real world kind of disappear.

If that's the ideal state of grace, is it sometimes hard to let go? Do you ever find yourself haunted by books or characters you've ostensibly laid to rest?

Sometimes characters, like Holly Gibney from the *Mr Mercedes* books and *The Outsider*, cry to come back – or Roland of Gilead – but they are the exceptions.

You've collaborated with the writer Peter Straub (on the novels *The Talisman* and *Black House*) and your sons Owen and Joe. Is there another you'd love to write a novel with?

I loved collaborating with my boys, and with Peter Straub, and will hopefully do it again. I'd love to collaborate with Colson Whitehead, Michael Robotham, Linwood Barclay, Alex Marwood, Tana French. No time, I guess, but those would be cool mixes. The ideal is to groove with someone so completely you make a third voice.

The president orders every book in America to be burned. You have time to save three of your own novels. Which three?

Which books of mine would I save? Dumb question, but I'll play. *Lisey's Story*, *The Stand* and *Misery*.

Discussion Questions

1. How do the themes of community and acceptance play out in the novel?
2. Discuss why Scott chooses to share his medical issue with Doctor Bob rather than his regular physician.
3. How does the relationship of Scott and Deirdre evolve throughout the story?
4. What role does the town of Castle Rock and its citizens play in this novel?
5. Discuss how Scott goes through the process of accepting his own fate, putting his affairs in order and striving to live the time he has left meaningfully. What do his actions reveal about his own character and what is most important to him?
6. How does the novel explore the concept of “elevation” both literally and metaphorically?
7. How does the author use supernatural elements to comment on real-world issues?
8. How did the novel’s ending leave you feeling?
9. Discuss how the novel connects with and/or differs from Stephen King’s other works of fiction.

Reviews

Kirkus Book Review

Source: <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/stephen-king/elevation/>

ELEVATION

By Stephen King • Release Date: Oct. 30, 2018

King (*The Outsider*, 2018, etc.) revisits a couple of familiar themes while paying heed to new realities in this elegant whisper of a story.

Scott Carey has a problem. He's a big guy, clocking in north of 240 pounds, but lately the bathroom scale has been telling him something different: He looks the same, but he's losing weight, pound after pound. "Twenty-eight pounds," he tells a doctor friend. "So far." There's more weight loss to come, recalling horrormeister King's *Thinner* (as Richard Bachman), though without the curse. But what is it that's remaking Scott—diabetes, cancer, a change of metabolism? It's not for want of eating: As King writes, "One of the benefits of his peculiar condition, aside from all the extra energy, was how he could eat as much as he wanted without turning into a podge." An adventurous palate, curiosity, and a brace of pooping pups who leave bits of themselves on his lawn put him into the orbit of a married couple, two newcomer women, who have opened a vegetarian Mexican restaurant in a quiet town in—where else?—Maine. The locals don't favor the couple with their business until—well, it would give too much away to talk about precipitating events, except to say that Scott has a way of being just where he's needed in the midst of inclement weather, to say nothing of a gift for setting a good example of neighborliness. As befits the premise, King delivers an uncharacteristically slim novel, just a hair longer than a novella, and one wishes there were just a little more backstory to give depth to Scott's good-guyness. Why is his reaching out to beleaguered neighbors important in "Trumpian" times? "It just is," Scott tells us, before he finds a memorable—and quite beautiful, really—way to depart a Podunk town made all the better for his presence.

A touching fable with a couple of deft political jabs on the way to showing that it might just be possible for us all to get along.

Booklist Review

Source: <https://www.booklistonline.com/Elevation-Stephen-King/pid=9709641>

Elevation
By Stephen King

Review by Donna Seaman. First published October 1, 2018 (*Booklist*).

Scott, lonely after a divorce he didn't want, could stand to lose a little weight, but, even though the scale shows a steady decrease, he looks exactly the same. He confides in the retired Doctor Bob, who is just as mystified, but at least provides good company. Now if only Scott could resolve his troubles with Deirdre and Missy, new neighbors who have opened a Mexican restaurant. He's puzzled by Deirdre's hostility until he discovers that the good folks of Castle Rock, Maine, have pilloried the women not only because they're "lesbeans," as one indoctrinated boy puts it, but because they had the nerve to get married. How Scott—bedazzled by his gradual elevation and the new perspective it brings—makes use of his gravity-defying condition to bring the town together during the holiday season (even as he faces a dire fate) makes for a sharply imaginative, sweetly funny, tenderly uplifting fable. Divisive times call for unifying tales. Written in masterly King's signature translucent style and set in one of his trademark locales, this uncharacteristically glimmering fairy tale calls unabashedly for us to rise above our differences.

HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: This succinct, magical, timely, and eminently discussable novel will bring in droves of King fans, along with all who enjoy charming yet edgy stories.

Washington Post Book Review

Source: https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/stephen-kings-halloween-book-is-shockingly-heartwarming/2018/10/29/82bc41f6-db1d-11e8-b3f0-62607289efee_story.html

Stephen King's Halloween book is shockingly... heartwarming?

Review By: Ron Charles
October 29, 2018

How fair is this? On Halloween, we creep into Stephen King's lair for terrors and scares, but here he is offering us insight and courage instead. You'll chew through a few chapters of "Elevation" before realizing there is no razor blade in this caramel apple. King's new novel is trick *and* treat, a poignant parable of prejudice overcome and resentment healed. The calls are coming from INSIDE OUR CONSCIENCE!

What's most surprising about "Elevation" is that this would seem the perfect moment for King to twist the fury of his Twitter feed into a story of gnashing invective against President Trump. But perhaps the Master of Fright knows we're getting plenty of horror from the White House. Besides, as [King told me](#) two years ago, he's already written a novel about Trump: "The Dead Zone."

But if this is a new King, fans of his work will recognize an old motif borrowed from the 1984 novel "Thinner." In that grim story, a lawyer is cursed with infinite weight loss — a kind of Jenny Craig nightmare inspired by King's efforts to shed pounds. In "Elevation," the predicament is similar but less macabre: Scott Carey is losing weight but not mass. On the outside, he appears the same as always — an athletic 42-year-old man who looks about 230 pounds. But every time he weighs himself, the scale says he's lighter. What's weirder, it doesn't matter what he's wearing — or even what he's holding. His weight just keeps dropping.

Of course, this story takes place in King's familiar setting: Castle Rock, that small town in Maine cursed by inexplicable phenomena such as killer trucks, deadly pranks and Sen. Susan Collins. This time, though, Scott's weight-loss troubles are the only mystery, a private tear in the fabric of an otherwise pedestrian reality, and Scott is not particularly interested in finding an explanation or a cure. At the opening of the novel, he consults with a retired doctor who wisely tells him, "I doubt very much if this is something that can be scientifically investigated." That confirms Scott's decision. He wants no part of any aggressive hospital treatments or government studies. He will wane with dignity.

King presents this with such tender wit that it's hard to keep in mind how supernatural it is. (The book even sports sweet pen-and-ink illustrations by Mark Edward Geyer that risk making the whole package look like something Richard Paul Evans would put under the Christmas tree.) We simply follow Scott's lead, turning our attention toward an everyday

drama of neighborhood life: Two women have recently moved in down the street, and they consistently fail to curb their dogs. Scott is seriously annoyed.

Ah, here we go — Cujo is back!

But no. This is not a novel about unleashed fury. It's a novel about measured response, about civil respect, about how we should behave in our small, gossipy towns. Think of it as "Salem's Ought."

When Scott politely asks the women to pick up after their dogs, he's rudely rebuffed but does not lose his temper. In fact, he's provoked to extra courtesy. "All I want," he says, "is for us to be good neighbors." What develops is a quiet, moral comedy as Scott strives for greater and greater civility, which only irritates one of the women more. And when he publicly defends them against a homophobic bully, Scott finds himself drawn into an ugly conflict that has divided the town.

Ah, here we go — like the deadly standoff in "Sleeping Beauties."

Again, no! This is a novel about exemplary behavior, about tensions resolved by adults capable of evolving beyond their narrow-minded beliefs.

What Stephen King gets right — and wrong — in 'The Outsider' Most of Castle Rock — a solidly Republican town — is willing to tolerate lesbians, but *married* lesbians? "That's a deal-breaker for lots of folks," an acquaintance tells Scott. "The county went for Trump three-to-one in '16 and they think our stonebrain governor walks on water. If those women had kept it on the down-low they would have been fine, but they didn't. Now there are people who think they're trying to make some kind of statement." Given that embedded bigotry, Scott's modest crusade for social enlightenment may be naive, but it couldn't be more relevant.

If "Elevation" isn't an attack on Trump, it is an implicit rebuke to his crude invective and toxic divisiveness. With a skeleton crew of friends, Scott gracefully raises the town's consciousness and expands the circumference of its appreciation. It's a reminder of the kind of good spirit that still fills America, no matter what demagoguery we're enduring from the top.

And yet this novel may repel stridently progressive readers as much as it does staunchly conservative ones — which, I suspect, will not trouble King too much. Having hundreds of millions of copies in print must provide a handy shield against the winds of confirmed prejudice or political correctness. But nowadays, few young fiction writers would be so tone-deaf as to create a monochromatic city or give us a shrill lesbian or celebrate a white savior who literally ascends toward heaven.

Scoff at those hoary clichés if you must, but King, now 71, is on the side of the angels. He has written a slim book about an ordinary man in an extraordinary condition rising above hatred and learning to live with tact and dignity. That's not much of a Halloween book, but it's well timed for our terrifying season.