

LaRoy's Cursed Man Theory of The Man In Black

To talk about whether or not Randall Flagg is the Man in Black (and of course all the other iterations), we have to first start with the original version of the Gunslinger through a series of 5 short stories published from 1978-81 in [*The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*](#). (I used to read this magazine religiously.) The short story published in 1981 had the original title of *The Gunslinger and the Dark Man*. In 1982, the five short stories were combined to be published as the novella, *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger*. Here is where we need to highlight the importance of the 1981 story that includes the Dark Man. In the transition for the novella publication, the Dark Man became the Man in Black.

King acknowledges that the Dark Man is Randall Flagg in an online interview from 2007 <http://web.archive.org/web/20071024144123/http://www.bordersstores.com/features/feature.jsp?file=stephenking>. The importance of this is that King wrote a poem about the Dark Man while still in college that was published in 1969. There is a very cool illustrated version of *The Dark Man* published in book form in 2013. The poem itself is about a wandering man that is much like the Rolling Stone song, *Sympathy for the Devil* in that the Dark Man is a person who has been around for a very long time and has seen a lot of stuff.

So, where does this all come together. King's version of the Dark Man and therefore, the Man in Black is actually a religious motif that has shown up repeatedly throughout a number of cultures and in various forms of literature. It is most prominent in a variety of Judeo-Christian beliefs that originate in the 13th century. Namely, the concept of the wandering Jew who is condemned to walk the earth until the end of time. Some beliefs are based on the curse of Cain as he was cursed by God for killing Abel, but there are a variety of other Biblical people who were also claimed to be cursed to walk the earth forever. Interestingly enough, some of them become saints, but there are others who at least in literary form became evil to bring about the end of time. One common thing is that only a few of them retain their names, others change their names throughout their immortal life span.

One specific story about a man cursed to walk the earth has been the soldier who used a spear to stab Christ during the crucifixion and gave Christ his fifth and final wound. This story was perpetuated throughout Europe. And a great modern example of this story would be the 1988, Demi Moore movie, *Seventh Sign*. The movie combines different religious mythologies in that the Hebrew concept of the Guf (well of souls) is about to be emptied. When it is emptied, the end of days has begun. However, Demi Moore's character is pregnant and her baby will be born without a soul, except that she has the opportunity to give up her life for her unborn child. By doing so, she will replenish the Guf and the world be saved by her act of altruism. Here's where the soldier cursed to wander the earth comes in..., the soldier is trying to make sure that Demi Moore's baby is born without a soul because if he is able to do so, the end of time will have begun and consequently, he will then be able to die. The soldier is trying to cause the end of time, much like Randall Flagg seems to be trying to cause the end of all universes.

On another side note, some people also argue that the mythologies around the Man Cursed to Wander the Earth may also be the origin of vampire mythology (enter Salem's Lot, if you will :-))

In any case, knowing King's body of work, it's easy to see where King could use this wandering man motif and construct Randall Flagg as the ultimate villain who for some reason is a man that is wandering the earth, or better yet the Dark Tower multiverse.

So, the Man in Black is the Dark Man who is Randall Flagg who is Walter o'Dim, who is Marten Broadcloak, and who is Walter Padick. He is an ageless stranger that serves the Crimson King (As a bastard son of Arthur Eld, The Crimson King is hellbent on destroying the Dark Tower Multiverse). Randall Flagg is the son of Maerlyn. Throughout his life, Flagg learned the Dark Arts as he become a sorcerer. So much like the wanderer in fantasy fiction, he may have learned spells to keep from aging. However, I feel that it is possible that he is cursed. No matter what explanation, living forever could drive someone to want to bring about the end of days. Hence, Flagg's unwavering service to the Crimson King.

We are still left with Roland's inability to recognize the Man in Black as Randall Flagg. I'd like to suggest three possible explanations:

1) the simplest explanation is that we know that Randall Flagg is a powerful sorcerer, and has the ability to change his appearance, or to at least look different (possibly the onlooker sees what they want to see and Flagg doesn't have to do anything). If this is the case, it makes sense that Flagg might change his appearance through time so as to not arouse too much suspicion (also a theme in literature and movies). Roland would not have any idea that the Man in Black is Randall Flagg.

2) Roland's sense of self and sense of time may be blinding him to recognizing the Man in Black as Randall Flagg. Specifically, Roland remembers Randall Flagg from when he was young. And Roland may actually recognize him, but, Roland's sense of time tells him that the person he sees as the Man in Black cannot be Randall Flagg, because Randall Flagg should have aged by now. So, if the Man in Black has not aged, Roland is subconsciously ignoring the fact that the Man in Black looks just like Randall Flagg. This however is hard to accept because Roland is hyper vigilant and sees to notice every detail.

3) And lastly a boring explanation, Roland does know that he is all of them but feels it unnecessary to discuss it. I'm not satisfied with this one, but I will acknowledge it as a possibility.

On a final note, I think the previous idea that the Man in Black could actually be an agent of good here is also possible. As someone who serves the Crimson King, he is trying to create chaos that will cause the fall of the Dark Tower. This in itself is the source of Roland's motivation -- he has to save the tower. The man in black's efforts to bring down the dark tower are actually the source of Roland's strength. So, indirectly, the man in black is actually providing Roland's motivation. Yin and Yang so to speak, you can't have one without the other. The Man in Black may think he is trying to bring an end to the universe, when everything he does causes Roland to work even harder at succeeding.