

Books

The Dead Zone
By Stephen King
Viking, \$11.95, 426 pages

Stephen King is something of a modern phenomenon. All of his books (*Carrie*, *Salem's Lot*, *The Shining*, *Night Shift*, *The Stand*) have spent some time on the bestseller list (hardback, paperback, or both), and his most recent effort is no exception. *The Dead Zone* will not disappoint King's loyal readers. It may gain him a broader audience, since it represents a

step forward in terms of literary expertise.

King's work is not as literary as that of Peter Straub, and certainly not on a par with M.R. James, but it can stand comparison with the best of Shirley Jackson and Richard Matheson. The horror genre is not an easy field to master, but King at his best (*The Shining*) is hard to touch. *The Dead Zone* ranks with his best.

Something of a departure from his earlier techniques, *The Dead Zone* relies on implication

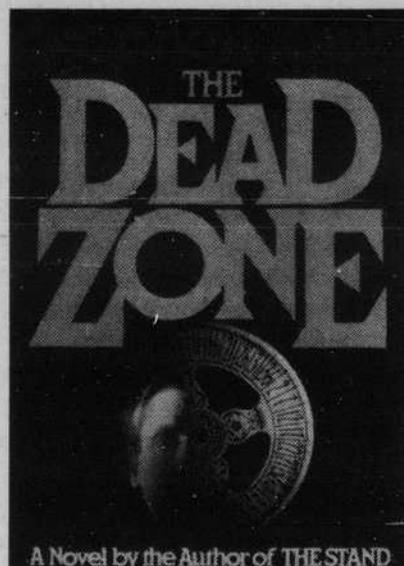
for its power. The story is not a *grand guignol* on the surface, but it certainly is by extension. It might be said that this is a "thinking man's" horror story, since the true weight of its power rests on the reader's identification with the main character and a certain ability to realize the full extent of the situation.

This book is something of an experiment for King. In his last novel (*The Stand*), he attempted to blend what were essentially two separate novels — one a horror story, the other science fiction — with only moderate success. In *The Dead Zone*, he has advanced his style into new realms. Subtlety is not the correct word, for that concept is not new to King (despite all its appalling imagery, *The Shining* is, at times, quite subtle). The

power of *The Dead Zone* lies below the literal level — not in symbolism, but in its ability to summon archetypal fears by implication. This is not great literature in any sense, but it is grand entertainment.

Still, King manages to lose control in a few spots. One scene is almost too obviously a lift from *Carrie*, and King cannot resist the temptation to refer to his own work within the story. Since this incident jolts the reader back to the pages of the book in a literal sense, it is a serious flaw, for it occurs at a time when the true horror of the situation is beginning to emerge.

King is a writer in transition. So far, he has ventured completely out of the horror genre only in a few short stories. *The Dead Zone* is not so much a step



A Novel by the Author of THE STAND

away as a refinement. Now in his mid-thirties, King has many productive years ahead of him. It will be interesting to see where he leads us.

By Dan Hays

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LPs

This Day and Age
D.L. Byron
Arista AB 4258

D.L. Byron can't decide whether he wants to be Bruce Springsteen or Elvis Costello. The cover of his debut album, *This Day and Age*, is a rip-off of Springsteen's *Born to Run* promotional posters, and the music inside is a rip-off of Springsteen, when it's not blatantly imitating Costello.

The lyrics in "Love in Motion," ("Nuclear injected on a Sunday

drive/"I'll be pretty lucky if I'm left alive") might sound good if one didn't get the feeling that Byron wrote them because they sounded like something Springsteen might have written. And when he follows them with "Just when I'm thinkin' that I've done my time/She's gonna make her punishment fit the crime," the effect is one of a police composite sketch.

"Could you describe him, ma'am?"

"Why yes, officer, he had horn-rimmed glasses..."

"Horn-rimmed glasses..."
"A scraggly beard, but maybe he's shaved by now."

"Scraggly beard..."
"He seemed pigeon-toed, and he was carrying a guitar."
"Notice anything unusual about the guitar, ma'am?"

"Now that you mention it, the guitar did seem a bit out of the ordinary. On the thin end, there were... there were..."

"There were what, ma'am?"

"Sneakers."

What *This Day and Age* has to offer is a sketch of a rock 'n' roll album — all the form, and little or no content. By its very nature, the music of a Springsteen or a Costello requires the performer to make a statement of some sort. Unfortunately, Byron has nothing to say.

The album isn't a total loss, however. Occasionally, Byron comes up with a song that's good enough to stand up on its own, and he shows enough talent throughout to make future efforts worth a listen. *This Day and Age*, though, is merely a mildly entertaining diversion between Springsteen albums. I'll wait for the real thing.

By Phil Bernstein

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