



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE RETURN OF THE KING BY J. R.R.TOLKIEN

1. By the end of *The Return of the King*, Frodo leaves the Shire to decent hobbits like Sam, while the elves leave Middle-earth to decent men like Aragorn. How would the whole moral impact of *The Return of the King* change if Frodo and the elves had *not* sailed into the West? What if they stuck around in Middle-earth even after the fall of Sauron? Would you prefer that ending? Why or why not? And what might it mean thematically?
2. Why does Tolkien include Éowyn's unrequited love for Aragorn in the novel at all? What does it add to *The Return of the King*? How would the novel change without this subplot? Why does Éowyn's romance with Faramir make it into the main part of *The Return of the King* while Aragorn and Arwen's love story gets stuck in the appendices? And what role does romance play in the characterizations of Éowyn, Aragorn, Faramir, and Arwen?
3. Because Frodo doesn't die—because he has to live on with his horrible memories of the Ring and his last struggle with Gollum—he starts to get sick back in the Shire. Would *The Return of the King* change very much if Frodo had died at Mount Doom? How would Frodo's death alter the rest of the book? Would Frodo dying at Mount Doom be a more or less effective conclusion than the one Tolkien actually wrote for *The Return of the King*? Why?
4. Legolas and Gimli both seem to disappear over the course of *The Return of the King*. They remain friends with Aragorn, but they don't have the same kind of strong narrative arc that the hobbits or the humans of the novel enjoy. Why not? How would *The Return of the King* be different if we followed Gimli or Legolas's perspective after the fall of Sauron?
5. Even now, at the end of *The Lord of the Rings* cycle, we still don't really know why Sauron is so evil in the first place. Why do you think Tolkien chooses to leave out that little tidbit? Would the story change if we got a bit more of Sauron's history?

Discussion questions provided by Shmoop.com.



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