

Discussion Guide for *Looking for the King*

You can see a Q&A with author David C. Downing on Youtube by going to ipnovels.com/novels/looking-for-the-king/discussion-guide/.

Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of the novel, Tom McCord is seeking evidence for a historical King Arthur. If there really is a historical figure behind the Arthurian legends, in what century did he most likely live? What would his castle at Camelot have looked like and what was the secret of his military success?
2. Note how many of the secondary characters you meet in the novel have names with Arthurian associations.
3. When Tom first meets C. S. Lewis, the Oxford don is reading a book called *Diary of an Old Soul*. Who wrote this book and how did this author influence Lewis's ideas? (Hint: C. S. Lewis edited a collection of his favorite excerpts from this author.)
4. As Tom notes, the Welsh, the French, and the English have all contributed important elements to Arthurian legend (as have the Germans). What are some major authors and texts from each "layer" of Arthurian tradition?
5. Note the locations in England with the strongest Arthurian associations—Tintagel, Cadbury, Glastonbury, Bodmin Moor. If you find these locations on a map, you'll notice which region of the country has the best claim to being "King Arthur country."
6. Why does Charles Williams associate the Holy Grail legends with the sacrament of the Eucharist? What does he mean by the term "Co-inherence"?
7. Dan Brown's best-selling novel *The Da Vinci Code* suggests that the Holy Grail is actually a person, not an object, and that one should look for clues in Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland. How does Tom's research undermine both of these claims? (Actually, entire books have been written on the careless research on which that novel is based. It may be a good story, but it is certainly not good history.)
8. At the beginning of the novel, Tom is mainly interested in finding the historical King Arthur. But after a few chapters, his focus turns to the Spear of Destiny instead of the Arthurian sites. What caused the change in Tom's research agenda? How does his underlying motivation remain unchanged?
9. Royston Cave and Gosforth Cross are real sites in England, looking very much today as described in the novel. Why do scholars associate Royston Cave with the Knights Templar and why do they ponder the mix of pagan and Christian elements on Gosforth Cross?
10. Why does Father Lasaur downplay the significance of Crucifixion scene on Gosforth Cross? What are Laura's objections to this interpretation? (Laura is echoing C. S. Lewis's own objections to this way of thinking. Note how Lewis and Tolkien reframe the Dying God myth in



the next chapter of the novel.)

11. In chapter eight, J. R. R. Tolkien advises Tom and Laura to look for the Spear of Destiny at an Anglo-Saxon site, not a Celtic one. Though Tolkien never actually discussed the Spear in his books or essays, he would have been familiar with the legends. How is it in keeping with his character that he would associate the Spear with the Anglo-Saxons?
12. In chapter ten, Tom and C. S. Lewis walk along the Thames (also called the Isis in the vicinity of Oxford) and Lewis sighs as he looks at a ribbon of cloud over an old barn. How does this experience lead to one of his most well-known arguments for the truth of Christianity? (The technical term for what Lewis called “Joy” is *Sehnsucht*, a German word for a kind of nameless longing that is both painful and pleasurable.)
13. In chapter twelve, Tom tells Charles Williams, J. R. R. Tolkien, and C. S. Lewis that each of them helped solve the puzzle of Laura’s dreams. How did each one contribute to Tom and Laura’s quest to interpret her dreams and find the spear?
14. At the end of the novel, Tom confesses that his quest to find the Spear has also become a journey to faith. What are some key milestones in Tom’s spiritual pilgrimage?