

Discussion Guide

Out of the Silent Planet, chs II–I6



OPEN

“The evening’s conversation was not such as would interest a terrestrial reader, for the *sorns* had determined that Ransom should not ask, but answer, questions. Their questioning was very different from the rambling, imaginative inquiries of the *hrossa*. They worked systematically from the geology of Earth to its present geography, and thence in turn to flora, fauna, human history, languages, politics and arts. When they found that Ransom could tell them no more on a given subject — and this happened pretty soon in most of their inquiries — they dropped it at once and went on to the next. Often they drew out of him indirectly much more knowledge than he consciously possessed, apparently working from a wide background of general science.’

‘It is because they have no *Oyarsa*,’ said one of the pupils.

‘It is because every one of them wants to be a little *Oyarsa* himself,’ said Augray.

‘They cannot help it,’ said the old *sorn*. ‘There must be rule, yet how can creatures rule themselves? Beasts must be ruled by *hnau* and *hnau* by *eldila* and *eldila* by *Maleldil*. These creatures have no *eldila*. They are like one trying to lift himself by his own hair — or one trying to see over a whole country when he is on a level with it — like a female trying to beget young on herself.’”

– ch. 16, p. 102



Entry

1. When is a time when you found that an assumption you made in your education — or a gap in your education — turned out to be wrong or insufficient upon later experience with reality? time that a story or film seemed to stick in your head in such a way that it influenced your thinking or living?



Recall

1. What makes a *hnau* distinct? What do we know about the three races of *hnau* on Malacandra? What about the *Oyarsa* or the *eldila*? *chs. 11–12*
2. Describe the circumstances surrounding Hyoui’s death. Could it have been prevented? Is Ransom at fault? *ch. 13*
3. What happens to Ransom on his journey from the *handramit* to the *harandra*, and what might this be showing us? *chs. 14–15*



Analysis

1. How have Ransom’s attitude and imagination been shaped by British imperialism and conquest? How are his assumptions corrected throughout his education among the *hrossa*? *chs. 11–15*
2. The *hrossa* are poets, and they regularly ask Ransom whether the poets on Thulcandra teach basic truths. How might attending to poetry, literature, storytelling, or filmmaking be an underappreciated means of education? *chs. 12–13*
3. How does Ransom’s encounter with the *sorn*, Augray, challenge his previous prejudices? What do we learn about how the *sorns* and the *hrossa* interact with one another? *ch. 16*
4. What does Ransom learn about his own planet? What do we learn about C.S. Lewis’s vision of what it means to be a human? *ch. 16*



DIVING DEEPER

“At that moment Ransom was deafened by a loud sound — a perfectly familiar sound which was the last thing he expected to hear. It was a terrestrial, human and civilized sound; it was even European. It was the crack of an English rifle; and Hyoui, at his feet, was struggling to rise and gasping. There was blood on the white weed where he struggled.

‘Hyoui, it is through me that this has happened. It is the other *hmâna* who have hit you, the bent two that brought me to Malacandra. They can throw death at a distance with a thing they have...’

– *ch. 13*



Reflection

1. Hyoui teaches Ransom about the unity between pleasures and memory, and the foolishness of trying to extend pleasures beyond their appointed season. Do you see wisdom in this? Are there examples from your own experience that either confirm or deny his sense of morality? *ch. 12*

“A pleasure is full grown only when it is remembered. You are speaking, *Hmân*, as if the pleasure were one thing and the memory another. It is all one thing. The *séroni* could say it better than I say it now. Not better than I could say it in a poem. What you call remembering is the last part of the pleasure, as the *crah* is the last part of a poem. When you and I met, the meeting was over very shortly, it was nothing. Now it is growing something as we remember it. But still we know very little about it. What it will be when I remember it as I lie down to die, what it makes in me all my days till then — that is the real meeting. The other is only the beginning of it. You say you have poets in your world. Do they not teach you this?”

– *Hyoui, ch. 12, p. 74*

2. When Ransom leaves the company of the *hrossa* he experiences great doubt on all that he has learned. How does his experience resonate with your own of trying to maintain your faith in seasons of loneliness and isolation? *chs. 15–16*