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Status

Robert Jones

Honorable Mention Essay

In about 50 years, we should see Stephen King's book, *The Stand*, achieve the status of a "classic." Why? For one thing, 50 years should be long enough to remove the taint of its author's enormous popularity, and allow the book to cross over and be considered as *serious* literature. For another, it has many of the qualities common to most classics. To illustrate these qualities, let's compare it to a story that has achieved classic status: Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

First, *The Stand* is simply a fine story, with a gripping plot. On one level, it keeps us turning the pages, as does the Tolkien, with the sheer excitement of its story line. As we are eager to see what Gandalf has up his sleeve, so do Abigail's exploits keep us on edge. On another level, both books are the classic confrontation of good and evil. As in many classics, the evil leaders are the distillations of centuries of wickedness. As Sauron has polished his vile talents for centuries, so has Flagg grinned and walked his way down the paths for untold years. To balance these blackguards, we have Gandalf appearing with the dawn of his age, and Abigail going strong into her fourth generation.

The second point of comparison is the depth of the evil forces, and the length of their reach. Flagg has the speed and range of a crow's flight, which he puts to his own sinister use. Sauron has his Eye with which he probes even into the minds of his opponents, wherever they may be. Flagg has his lieutenant Lloyd, and his mad sub-ego, Trashcan Man, to help him dominate his army. Sauron guides his Ringwraiths in terrorizing his armies of Orcs and goblins, and receives crucial help from his pets, Gollum and Shelob.

Third is the strength and believability of the good guys. Gandalf and Abigail lead their forces in spite of their own human misgivings and fears. The troops charm and engulf us in their lives: Sam with his fierce loyalty, and Frannie's equally fierce determination to make a life with Stu. When we add Nick, Tom, Ralph, and Larry to Abigail's group; and Strider, Faramir, some Elves, and a few Hobbits to Gandalf's band, the result is a strong, admirable cast that demands our faith and good will.

Fourth is the struggle itself. Tolkien and King both carry us through an agonizing series of preliminary conflicts, in which the heroes and heroines are tested and tempered. Both groups have interim periods in which to rest and regain their humanity, which makes us love them even more. But all of them have the shadow of the struggle hanging over them. They never lose sight of the job at hand. Both groups endure attrition of their forces: Boromir and Harold fall under the dominion of the enemy, and their strength is lost. Yet both groups struggle on; they tighten their belts and trudge on toward the final confrontation.

The confrontation is the fifth point of comparison, and a close parallel between Tolkien

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and King. In both, the finale is cataclysmic, affecting the lives of not only the characters, but of the entire world. Every event that can happen in the future of both worlds hangs on the outcome of the confrontation.

The worlds themselves make a final point of comparison. They are both true worlds: Tolkien's with its incredible detail in cast, geography, and history; King's with its familiar settings and supremely likeable characters. Both stores absorb us in the cast and the tale. Both give us new heights of accomplishment and depths of anguish. And most importantly: both welcome us, for the first or the tenth time. They create their own niche in our memories where we are glad to return whenever we need to step momentarily out of our own time. For this reason, if none other, *The Stand* earns a place with the classics. It gives us an alternate existence. What more can we ask of great fiction?

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