

# **Out of the Silent Planet Study Guide**

**Out of the Silent Planet by C. S. Lewis**

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# Plot Summary

Out of the Silent Planet is a science fiction tale of Dr. Elwin Ransom's journey from Earth to live among the inhabitants of Mars, called Malacandra in the local language. Through the medium of science fiction, the novel addresses several social issues such as racism, colonialism and religion. It is the first book in C.S. Lewis' Space Trilogy.

While on a solitary walking tour of the English countryside, Dr. Elwin Ransom, a college language professor, is kidnapped and drugged by two men. He awakens to find himself aboard a spherical spacecraft. His captors are Devine, a wealthy and greedy Englishman with a sinister streak, and Weston, the brilliant physicist who designed the spacecraft. Weston explains they are bound for one of the other planets in the solar system, but does not reveal which, except to say that the inhabitants of the planet call it Malacandra.

Ransom learns that Weston and Devine intend to hand him over to the inhabitants of Malacandra, called sorn. He imagines the sorn to be terrible creatures intent on killing or sacrificing him and decides he would prefer suicide to such a death. He resolves to escape or to die trying.

Ransom does manage to escape his captors. Just as they are about to hand him over to a group of sorn, they are attacked by a dangerous sea creature called a hnakra. In the confusion of the attack, Ransom escapes into a forest of enormous plants.

Ransom wanders in the forest for a time, and comes across a seal-like creature which seems to be talking to itself. Deciding the creature must be intelligent, Ransom makes signs to it, managing to communicate that he is hungry. The creature, which Ransom learns is called a hross, feeds him and takes him by boat to a canyon where other hross live.

Ransom lives among the hross for several weeks and gradually learns the language and culture of the people of Malacandra. The hross, he observes, live in the canyons, use simple tools and enjoy poetry and song. The sorn, he is told, inhabit the higher areas and are knowledgeable in history, astronomy and science. The pfifltriggi are a third race, skilled at making beautiful and useful objects. Ransom repeatedly asks which race is dominant, or in charge of the planet. The hrossa seem confused at this notion, and answer that Oyarsa, an entity that lives in a place called Meldilorn, has reign over the entire planet.

Ransom is summoned to Meldilorn by an eldil, the nearly invisible creatures who serve Oyarsa. Assisted by the hross and a sorn named Augray, Ransom makes his way to Meldilorn, which is inhabited by all types of Malacandrians. While examining an artistic representation of the solar system in Meldilorn, Ransom realizes that Malacandra is Mars.



Like the eldil, Oyarsa is invisible but can be heard. Weston and Devine have also been summoned by Oyarsa, and the three men are interrogated. Ransom learns that Devine's intentions are to take gold from Malacandra back to Earth and that Weston intends to pave the way for humans to take over the planet. Oyarsa quizzes Ransom for a long time about the Earth, revealing to him that a creature similar to Oyarsa once had rule over the Earth, but had not been heard from for hundreds of years. For that reason, Earth is called Thulcandra, which means "silent planet."

Oyarsa tells Weston and Devine they must return to Earth in their spaceship but invites Ransom to stay on Malacandra if he wishes. Ransom decides to return with the two men.

The next to last chapter of the book is written from the viewpoint of the narrator and explains how he came to learn of Ransom's adventure and to write a fictionalized account of it. Finally, a fictional excerpt from a letter by Ransom himself is presented. These chapters link the events and characters presented in the novel to current events, and foreshadow a possible great upheaval among the planets of the solar system.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Out of the Silent Planet is a science fiction tale of Dr. Elwin Ransom's journey from Earth to live among the inhabitants of Mars, called Malacandra in the local language. Through the medium of science fiction, the novel addresses the social issues of racism, colonialism and religion. It is the first book in C.S. Lewis' Space Trilogy.

A nameless pedestrian walks along a lane in the English countryside. It has been raining, and he has just been turned away from an inn at the small town of Nadderby. The pedestrian is tall, between 35 and 40, and dressed slightly shabbily with the look of a schoolteacher or doctor. In fact, he is a professor of philology at Cambridge University and his name is Edwin Ransom.

Ransom wants to find lodging at a farm before reaching Sterk, but the countryside is sparsely inhabited. After hiking for two miles, he sees a light and heads toward it, hoping to find a friendly farmhouse. Instead, Ransom finds the light is coming from a small cottage. As he approaches the cottage, a woman rushes out the door, colliding with him. She explains that she heard him coming and thought he might be her son, Harry, who is late returning home from working at The Rise, a nearby farm. Harry, she tells Ransom, is a simple-minded boy who tends the furnace for the two professors who live at The Rise.

Ransom quizzes the woman about The Rise and the gentlemen who live there, wondering if they might be willing to give him a place to stay for the night. She is doubtful, but Ransom resolves to call on the farm, wondering if he might even know the men there. The woman has become upset about her son, and asks Ransom to make sure he is sent home safely. He agrees, and sets off down the lane toward The Rise. After a time, Ransom comes to a hedge with a white gate, which he assumes must be the entrance to The Rise. Trying the gate, he finds it locked. He throws his pack over the gate and crawls through the thick hedge.

The Rise is an unwelcoming sight, with an overgrown yard surrounding a dark stone house. There are no lights, and the only sign of habitation is heavy smoke coming from a chimney. Ransom rings the bell, but receives no response. While waiting, he becomes aware of a scuffling sound and sharp voices. He hears a boy cry out "Let me go, I'm not going in there!" Throwing down his pack, Ransom runs toward the voices. He interrupts two men wrestling with a boy, who Ransom assumes is Harry. Surprised, the men let go of the boy, and one of them demands to know what Ransom is doing there and how he got in. Ransom explains, and then protests that they should let the boy go home.

When Ransom tells the men his name, the second of the two men recognizes him as a former schoolmate. His name is Devine. Ransom suddenly remembers Devine from his school days, and recalls that he did not like him while at school. Devine introduces the



first man as Professor Weston, a physicist. Devine explains they were simply trying to calm the boy down as he had become hysterical, but Harry claims they were trying to force him into Weston's laboratory. Devine dismisses the boy's claim and after a conversation with Weston that Ransom does not hear, agrees to send Harry home. He invites Ransom into the house for a drink. Ransom agrees, reluctantly.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

Lewis introduces the main characters in the first chapter. Ransom is a college professor of philology, the study of language. His interest in language will become important in later chapters. Devine is outwardly friendly, but seems to have a sinister side as well. Weston is gruff and apparently violent. All three are English gentlemen, however, and it is interesting to note that even after interrupting what appears to be a violent kidnapping, Ransom is polite and reserved in the manner of a gentleman.

The relationships among the three men are also first developed in Chapter 1. Weston is introduced as a brilliant physicist, and he treats the other two men with contempt. Nevertheless, Devine seems to hold some kind of authority over Weston, as he is able to convince him to let Harry free and invite Ransom into the house. Ransom is reluctant to stay at The Rise, but his desire for a drink and warm place to sleep overrides his hesitation. Ransom displays a certain sense of adventure up to this point. He is, after all, traveling alone on foot without any previous arrangements for lodging. He also displays a slight reckless streak, as when he throws his pack over the locked gate of The Rise before thinking about how he will get through. This adventurous and reckless spirit may be part of why he agrees to join Devine and Weston in the house, despite the odd incidents he has witnessed.

At the time Lewis wrote this book, he was himself a college professor at Oxford University, as was his good friend the author J.R.R. Tolkein. Tolkein, like Ransom, was a philologist.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

Ransom is shown into the house and seated in a messy room. Devine brings in a bottle of whiskey and quizzes Ransom while he opens it and pours out two glasses. Devine learns Ransom has left on his walking tour without telling anyone his plans or making prior arrangements anywhere. He is on a break from teaching and has no family in England.

Devine apologizes that he has forgotten to bring soda water to have with the whiskey, and excuses himself, taking the glasses with him out of the room. While away, he drugs Ransom's drink. He returns with the glasses, and Ransom, thirsty from his long walk, drinks the whiskey down. As Devine chats, Ransom slowly loses consciousness.

While he is knocked out, Ransom has a vivid dream in which Weston, Devine and he are climbing over a high wall. He is the last man over, but becomes stuck on top of the wall, with one leg over each side. On the far side of the wall is darkness and some strange creatures. The creatures show Weston and Devine through a door in the wall back to where they had come from. Meanwhile, Ransom feels as though he is split between the two sides.

Ransom slowly gains consciousness again and becomes aware of Weston and Devine discussing preparations for a trip. He is aware of Weston standing over him, and when Devine leaves the room, Ransom lunges at Weston and makes for the front door. He manages to get the door open, and nearly escapes to the front porch when he is suddenly struck on the head from behind. As he loses consciousness once more, he is aware of being pulled back into the house and the door being shut.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

In the second chapter, the mystery of Weston and Devine's intentions deepens. Devine casually questions Ransom to determine that he will not be missed for several months at least, should they kidnap him. It is revealed that the two men will go to great lengths to achieve their yet unknown purpose.

Ransom's dream foreshadows his eventual journey with Weston and Devine to the strange land of Malacandra, and seems to refer to the connection he will eventually come to feel to both planets.





# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Ransom wakes up in a strange, small room containing only a bed and a table. One wall of the room is warm, and at first he thinks he must be in one of the outbuildings of The Rise, perhaps next to the furnace room. Through a skylight in the ceiling he sees stars in the dark sky and what he supposes to be the full moon, although it looks strange to him. He wonders if the drug he was given in his drink has affected his vision.

The room is oddly shaped and seems to continuously change proportions. The walls seem to slope outward toward the ceiling, but when Ransom looks closer, they appear square. While investigating, Ransom discovers the walls are of metal. He hears a humming noise and decides he must be in some kind of airship.

Confused, Ransom sits back on his bed and wonders about his situation. He looks once more through the skylight at the giant orb, which he realizes is much too large to be the full moon. Just then, a door opens and Weston walks in. He is nude. Ransom turns to him and confirms that indeed it is not the moon he sees floating in space. It is the Earth.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter 3 signals a dramatic shift of setting in the story. The author has given the reader very little indication in the preceding chapters of the intentions of Weston and Devine, making the surprise and shock Ransom feels at discovering he is in space a surprise to the reader as well. By using this point of view through most of the story, the author reveals information to the reader only as it is revealed to Ransom.

Although this chapter is a significant shift in the story, very little actually occurs. Ransom wakes up, looks around his room and out the skylight, and discovers he is in space. The author spends most of the chapter describing the small, plain room where Ransom awakens, the sounds he can hear, and what he can see through the skylight. Description is an important part of this novel, much of which takes place in completely imaginary settings.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Ransom is temporarily overwhelmed with fear. He confirms with Weston that they are indeed in space, and demands to know why he has been kidnapped. He also asks how the ship works. Weston contemptuously explains that Ransom could not possibly understand the physics behind how the ship works, and even if he could, he would not be told. Weston does say the ship is powered by solar radiation.

Weston tells Ransom they are on their way to the planet Malacandra. He hints that Malacandra is one of the other planets in our solar system, but will not tell Ransom which. Weston tells him Malacandra is inhabited, and that he has communicated with its inhabitants.

Again, Ransom demands to know why he has been kidnapped. Weston responds he is simply following orders. When Ransom asks whose orders Weston is carrying out, Weston abruptly ends the conversation. He leads Ransom out of the room into one bathed in extremely bright light, where they will eat breakfast.

As they move from room to room, the geometry of the ship continues to shift strangely. Weston explains that the ship is a sphere, built around a hollow core, and so has its own center of gravity. The center of the sphere is always down while they are in space. They are like giants striding on the surface of a planet, which makes the straight walls and corners seem to shift constantly.

The heat from the blazing light is almost unbearable, and Ransom strips nude. To counteract weightlessness, he puts on a belt with weights attached. Weston and Ransom eat breakfast. Ransom is eager to find out more from Weston, but Weston warns him not to talk too much in order to conserve air. After eating, Weston leaves through one of the many closed doors in the room.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

The theme of fear and Ransom's courage is further developed in Chapter 4. Although he is so afraid at discovering his situation that he can temporarily think of nothing else, he regains his composure and demands an explanation from Weston. Ransom is not sure where this strength comes from, just as he was not sure what drove him to climb through the hedge of *The Rise* in the first chapter, or to intervene as Weston and Devine were wrestling with Harry. Ransom's contemplation of his own fear and courage will continue throughout the story.

Weston treats Ransom with contempt, as he treats everyone he feels is less intelligent than he. This trait of Weston's will become important later in the story.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Ransom settles into life aboard the space ship. He observes Devine and Weston taking shifts in the closed room, which he assumes is the control room. Despite his desperate situation, Ransom is not upset. He spends his time looking at the amazing sights from his skylight and listening to the tinkling of tiny meteors on the hull of the ship.

As time progresses, Ransom begins to feel a new vitality, which Weston explains is due to being so near the sun's rays. Ransom also reflects that his elevated mood is because the mysteries of space are being revealed to him. Ransom explores as much of the ship as he is allowed to. Many of the rooms are empty, and he supposes they are meant to carry some cargo back to Earth.

Ransom assumes the duties of ship's cook. One day, while in the galley, he overhears one side of a conversation between Devine and Weston. They are discussing what is to be done with Ransom once they reach the planet. Devine mentions something called a sorn, which Ransom imagines to be some terrible creature. Devine speculates that the sorn may intend to sacrifice Ransom in some kind of ritual.

Ransom resolves that suicide would be better than death at the hand of some terrible beast. He takes a knife from the galley to use for this purpose should he need it. He returns to his room and sleeps.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Weston and Devine's intentions are revealed a little more in this chapter. They intend to hand Ransom over to the inhabitants of Malacandra once they reach the planet, perhaps in exchange for something. Again, the theme of Ransom's fear and courage appear in his resolve to kill himself rather than give his fate over to something unknown. While he has taken a subservient role as the ship's cook, Ransom is in control of his own destiny.

The sorn, which Ransom presumes are the creatures which control whatever planet he is bound for, are to play an important role in the tale. More important, perhaps, is the role Ransom's fear of the sorn plays in the action of the story. They personify the unknown for Ransom, and his fear of the unknown will eventually create problems for him.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Ransom wakes refreshed and contemplates what he has learned about Weston and Devine's plans for him. His fear becomes almost invigorating to him, and he feels he would be able to face death if the time comes.

The temperature in the ship begins to fall, and the geometry of the ship begins to change again as it enters the gravity of Malacandra. The center of gravity of the ship is shifting from the center to the side closest to the planet, turning walls into floors and floor into ceilings. The men busy themselves moving things around to prevent them from tumbling.

As the ship enters the atmosphere of Malacandra, the light dims. Ransom finds the loss of light depressing. As the ship finally lands, he speculates that rather than the planets being islands of life in a desolate universe, the reverse seems to be true. Space is vibrant and alive, Ransom thinks, and the planets relatively dull and lifeless.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Ransom's philosophical side comes to light in Chapter 6. As the chapter opens, Ransom is once again contemplating the nature of his fear and confronting the unknown. In fact, even during something as dramatic as actually landing on a faraway planet, Ransom is deeply engaged in thought, the author tells us.

As in Chapter 3, very little takes place in this chapter to advance the story, and the author engages in extensive description of the ship and space travel to enhance the setting. Ransom's philosophical thoughts about planets being "dark" places among the bright heavens foreshadow the actual account of the solar system he will learn on Malacandra.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

The ship lands and Weston and Devine open the manhole to get out. Ransom finds himself impatient to get out and see the planet. Devine goes out first, followed by Ransom, and Weston, holding a revolver.

Ransom first notices the ground, which is covered with a pinkish foliage. The sky is pale blue and he sees a rose colored cloud in the distance. It is cold. He sees a small hut nearby and immediately assumes it was made by the inhabitants. He is corrected by Weston, who informs him that the hut was built by Devine and Weston on a previous journey. The three men begin to transfer supplies and provisions from the ship to the hut.

From his limited view, Ransom notes that the ship has landed on an island or peninsula in the middle of a lake of blue water. Everything Ransom can see has a strange, elongated form, such as the waves on the lake and the tall purple plants in the near distance.

The men complete their work and sit down to eat. With escape still in mind, Ransom tries to eat as much food as possible in case he sees an opportunity. As they finish eating, Weston and Devine notice something approaching from across the water. They stand and push Ransom closer to the edge of the water.

On the opposite shore, Ransom sees several elongated creatures coming toward them. They remind him of figures he has seen in archaeology textbooks. These, he decides, must be sorns. He turns to Weston and Devine and demands they set him free, but they respond by pointing their guns at him. Weston says the creatures want them to cross over and Devine and Weston begin to pull Ransom into the water with them. Ransom digs in and resists.

Suddenly, the creatures cry out. Something is streaking toward the men through the water. Weston lets go of Ransom and fires his revolver. Ransom is aware of a black creature with snapping jaws as Devine slips into the water and Weston fires his gun several more times.

Ransom takes advantage of the confusion and runs in the opposite direction. Splashing through the water, which he finds is warm, he climbs out the opposite bank and runs into a forest of the strange, tall plants.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

The strange landscape of Malacandra is described further in Chapter 7 and Ransom gets his first glimpse of the 18-foot-high creatures known as sorns. His forethought,



planning and quick response allow Ransom to escape his captors when he sees an opportunity. Just as when he threw his pack over the locked gate of The Rise without really thinking about it first, and when he made his dash to escape the house after being drugged, Ransom is showing that in addition to being a man of the mind, he is a man of quick action.

The black, snapping creature that attacks the men is called a hnakra. This creature is introduced in this chapter, and will play an important role later in the story.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Ransom continues to run through the wilderness. Behind him he hears more gunshots and voices, but then silence. His large meal and the fatigue from space travel slow him down, and he walks aimlessly, taking in the strange landscape. He sees several streams of the warm blue water, which seems to be fizzing like seltzer. He becomes very thirsty, but does not dare to drink it, not knowing if it safe or not. Small red creatures dart in and out among the enormous trees.

Ransom finally rests beside one of the streams, which offers warmth. He winds his wristwatch and thinks about Earth. Ransom is exhausted, but he knows he must keep moving, fearing another of the terrible, black sea creatures may be in the stream. Telling himself he will only rest for a few minutes and then get up, he relaxes and quickly falls asleep.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Chapter 8 signals a shift in the story. Free from his captors, Ransom is now on his own on the strange planet. Up to now, the characters Weston and Devine have driven the action and exposition. For the rest of the novel, Ransom takes over the central role.

Ransom's possibly unstable mental state is mentioned toward the end of the chapter, when he begins talking to himself. It is interesting that Ransom's wristwatch has stopped and that he should pause to wind it, even though he has no way to set it to the "correct" time.



## Chapter 9

### Chapter 9 Summary

Ransom awakes from intense thirst. Still half awake, Ransom imagines that another man named Ransom is wandering the forest, and would help him if he could just find him. Despite his imagining he had warned this other Ransom not to drink the water, he begins to drink from the stream and finds the water is good. He snaps out of his delusion and wonders if he might not be going mad. He wonders if he perhaps already is mad and is actually in an asylum on Earth, and is imagining the entire journey. Ransom resumes wandering through the wilderness, but continues to slip in and out of the thought that there are two Ransoms in the forest.

Ransom runs across a herd of enormous giraffe-like creatures lumbering through the forest, eating the leaves off the tops of the tall trees. They seem to be gentle creatures, and Ransom is heartened to know that not all the creatures on the planet are terrible and frightening. Coming shortly behind the grazing creatures, however, is a sorn. Ransom takes off in fright and runs frantically, assuming the sorn are hunting for him.

Ransom runs to the edge of the forest where he finds a lake like the one near where the space ship landed. He drops to his stomach and drinks. He hears no sign of pursuit from the forest. Suddenly, a black seal-like creature emerges from the water. It does not see Ransom, but stands up and begins making sounds. Ransom immediately recognizes the sound as some kind of language. The creature appears to be talking to itself.

The creature notices Ransom, and for a time the two stare at one another, each afraid. The creature turns away and Ransom calls it back. The creature offers Ransom a drink from a bottle it has around its waist, and Ransom accepts. Through signals, Ransom learns the creature is called a hross, and learns a few of the words of the hross language. He signals he is hungry, and the hross gives him some food, stored in a boat the hross has moored nearby.

As Ransom eats, he contemplates the intelligent creature and his own perception of it. If he thinks of it as a human, then it becomes something grotesque. However he finds if he thinks of it as a unique animal with its own intelligence, then it becomes something wonderful.

### Chapter 9 Analysis

The author suggests some uncertainty about the reality of the events taking place by having Ransom speculate that perhaps none of his experiences are actually happening and he is still on Earth imagining everything.





The hross, seal-like creatures, expert boatmen and poets, are introduced in Chapter 9. The language of Malacandra, which plays an important role in the story, is also introduced and the character of Ransom, a linguistics professor, is perfectly suited to explore this language.

Ransom's thoughts about the nature of intelligence and what it means to be human signal the beginning of a shift in his perceptions. Until now, his fear of the unknown has made him imagine the intelligent creatures of Malacandra must be savage, as he imagines the sorn are. The hross still can seem grotesque in his view, but he realizes that as he learns more about it, it seems less and less frightening. This theme is carried throughout the rest of the book.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

The hross invites Ransom into its boat. Ransom accepts, and they set off across the choppy water of the lake. The waves, like everything on the planet, are high and sharp, and the ride is so rough that Ransom vomits.

They descend into a steep, straight canyon, which Ransom learns is called a handramit. They spend the entire day traveling, sometimes leaving the water and carrying the boat to the next stream.

It is dark when they reach their destination, where Ransom sees the light of a fire through the trees of a forest. They walk toward the fire and Ransom is surrounded by other hross and their children. These are his last memories before falling asleep.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

In Chapter 10, the pace of the novel shifts dramatically. Before now Ransom has been either a captive or fugitive, and the action has been fast-paced. Now Ransom is free and apparently safe for the time being among the hross. His slow journey by boat with the hross signals this shift in the action.

This is another of the author's highly descriptive chapters where very little action takes place, but more of the scenery of Malacandra is described. The description of the straight, deep canyons is a hint to the reader that Malacandra is actually Mars. Early astronomers viewing Mars through telescopes saw what appeared to be long straight lines on the surface of Mars, which some proposed were a series of canals built by intelligent beings. Improvements in telescopes and eventual space probes showed that these lines were illusions.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

Ransom spends several weeks among the hross, walking and exploring the landscape and learning the language from an elder hross named Hnohra. Ransom learns enough of the language to attempt to explain that he came from another planet, and is surprised to learn that the hross seem to have a basic understanding of astronomy and the solar system. They point out another planet in the night sky called Thulcandra, meaning the silent planet.

Ransom tells the hross about Weston and Devine and how he is being chased. He is told that he should go to see Oyarsa. Ransom inquires about Oyarsa and learns he is the ruler of Malacandra and lives in a place called Meldilorn.

The hross also teach Ransom about their religion, which holds that the universe was created by Maleldil the Young, who rules over everything. Ransom feels the responsibility to educate the hross about Christianity, but restrains himself, feeling the roles have been reversed, and he is the heathen being taught the faith.

The hross tell Ransom about the other intelligent races of creatures on Malacandra. The sorn live in the high places of the planet and are educated in science and history. The pfiltriggi are skilled in making things from gold, which they mine from deep underground. Ransom decides this gold is what has motivated Devine to return to Malacandra.

Ransom asks which of the three races of Malacandra is dominant, or which one rules the planet. The hross are puzzled by this question, and explain that only Oyarsa rules and the three races are equal.

In turn, Ransom is asked to describe his home planet. He finds himself at a loss to describe it well, and in light of the apparently peaceful life on Malacandra he is too ashamed to explain the violence and warfare which take place on Earth. The hross immediately begin to make poems about the Earth based on Ransom's descriptions.

When Ransom mentions the dark creature which attacked the space ship, the hross become animated. This is certainly a hnakra, they tell Ransom. The hross traditionally hunt the hnakra, they tell him, and one has not been seen for many years. They immediately begin making preparations to hunt it. Ransom and Hyoui, the hross who first brought Ransom in his boat, make way to Hyoui's boat to prepare it for the hunt. Along the way, Ransom sees a small hross talking to itself. He inquires, and the hross tells him he is talking to an eldil. Ransom sees nothing, which surprises the hross.



## Chapter 11 Analysis

The peaceful society and some of the religion of Malacandra is described in Chapter 11. Ransom is further surprised to learn that the hross are more intelligent than he originally thought. At one point, he actually feels as though he is being taught like a child, rather than simply observing like a scientist. This signifies Ransom's continuing change in outlook toward the unknown. He finds he may actually have something to learn from this strange culture.

Ransom hears about Oyarsa, the ruler of Malacandra, for the first time. The dramatic element of the hnakra reappears in this chapter and the next, and will become a central motivating element in the story.

An eldil, one of the invisible messengers of Oyarsa, appears briefly at the end of the chapter. The eldil, Ransom will learn later, have the power to influence people and events. The presence of an eldil at this point in the story suggests that Oyarsa is aware of what is happening with Ransom, and is perhaps even influencing what occurs.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Ransom and Hyoui prepare Hyoui's boat for the hunt. Ransom asks Hyoui if the three peoples of Malacandra ever go to war with one another and is surprised when Hyoui answers he cannot imagine any reason for ever doing so. Ransom inquires further into the habits of the hross and learns they are monogamous, mating for only a short time in their lives, and that they treasure the memory of something as much or more as the thing itself.

Hyoui explains the honor he would receive for killing the hnakra, or dying while hunting it. The hnakra is the enemy of the hross, he explains, but is also beloved by them. The danger of death presented by the hnakra makes life more vivid and enjoyable by comparison, Hyoui says.

As they continue to work on the boat, Ransom asks Hyoui about the day they first met, when Hyoui seemed to be talking to himself. Hyoui answers that he was speaking with an eldil, one of the messengers of Oyarsa. He tells Ransom that eldil are hard to see and he is not sure if Ransom is even able to see them.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Ransom learns more about the peaceful ways of the Malacandrian peoples from Hyoui in Chapter 12. They have all they want and have no need to fight over food or territory. The hross are naturally monogamous, and Hyoui tells about a hross who once loved two females and was considered insane because of it.

The theme of fear and death is explored further in this chapter. Ransom speculates on the role of death in life. The hross seem to hold an outlook on death that is very different from his own. They almost welcome death as a wonderful transformation. This courageous view of death will influence Ransom's own opinion in the remainder of the story.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

The entire hross village is stirring, preparing for the hunt. Ransom learns he is to have a place of honor at the front of Hyoui's boat, along with another hross named Whin. Ransom reflects that just a short time before he would never have imagined taking on such a dangerous adventure, but now finds himself eager to go and willing to face the danger. He also wants to prove to the hross that humans can be honorable creatures.

A hundred boats set out to hunt the hnakra. Ransom is exhilarated as the boat moves swiftly through the water. Hyoui tells him an eldil is approaching them over the water. Ransom sees nothing, but is amazed to learn he can hear the eldil speaking with Hyoui. The eldil tells Hyoui that Ransom should not be there, that he is being chased by two other men and should be on his way to see Oyarsa right away. Hyoui asks the eldil if he has a message for his wife. The eldil responds he does, but Hyoui will not be able to carry it to her. The eldil disappears.

Hyoui tells Ransom that for them, the hunt is over. He must take Ransom to shore and show him the way to Oyarsa. Ransom protests, but Hyoui insists he must obey the eldil. Suddenly, the boat is attacked by the hnakra. Hyoui, Whin and Ransom subdue and kill the creature. Ransom feels transformed by the experience. He has stood with his friends and conquered an enemy. He feels he has finally "grown up."

During the battle, the boat runs aground, and they are all resting on the shore next to the body of the hnakra, proud of their feat. Just then, a shot rings from the forest behind and Hyoui falls, bleeding. Ransom determines at once that Weston and Devine have seen them and are shooting at them. As Hyoui lies dying from his wound, Ransom apologizes to him for the corruption of men. Just before he dies, Hyoui responds that Ransom is a hnakra-slayer, and that nothing else matters.

Ransom and Whin take cover. Whin insists Ransom must still go to Oyarsa and tells him how to find the road over a nearby mountain which will take him to Meldilorn, where Oyarsa lives. On the way Ransom will find Augray's Tower, Whin tells him. Augray will help him get to Meldilorn. Ransom is humiliated, but Whin presses him to leave immediately, telling him Oyarsa will protect him on his way. Ransom walks into the forest.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

Chapter 13 marks a turning point in the story and a transformation of the main character. In his adventures to this point, Ransom has been continually contemplating his own fear and courage in the unknown situations he has found himself in. After he and the hross slay the hnakra, he realizes he has fully confronted his fear of the unknown and mastered it. In his own mind, he has "grown up."

Ransom has also been fully accepted by the hross, and the fact he can now hear the eldil indicates he is becoming more and more acclimated to living on Malacandra.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

Ransom fights the urge to simply give himself up to Weston and Devine and resolves to make the journey to Meldilorn to see Oyarsa at all costs. He imagines that Oyarsa might be a sorn, or perhaps some kind of god. He feels as though he is walking straight into the hands of the sorn from which he has been running ever since landing on the planet.

Ransom makes his way to the foot of the mountain and begins climbing along a narrow path that leads over it. As he gets higher, he begins to feel the effects of altitude. The air grows thinner and colder. Confused from lack of oxygen, he looks for anything that might be Augray's Tower. He sees a faint light ahead and makes his way toward it. He discovers the light is coming from a fire burning in the mouth of a cavern. He enters the cavern and is surprised to find, sitting next to the fire beneath his gigantic shadow, a sorn.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

Once again Ransom is on his own in the wilderness. This episode of his journey parallels the beginning of his journey walking through the English countryside, following the light from the cottage house.

It is the shadow of the sorn on the walls of the cave which Ransom sees before he sees the actual sorn. This is suggestive of the allegory of the cave first presented by the Greek philosopher Plato. Plato describes a cave in which a fire casts the shadow of objects before it onto the far wall. Some people, Plato says, look only at the shadows and think that they represent the "real" object. Others turn their heads and look at the actual object. Up to this point, Ransom has only imagined what the sorn must be like based on his fears and prejudices. Now he is face to face with an actual sorn, looking at the real thing.





# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

The sorn invites Ransom into the cave. Ransom is surprised to find he is not afraid of the sorn, and enters the warm cave. He asks the sorn if he is Augray, and the sorn answers that he is.

Ransom looks closely at Augray and determines the sorn is not as frightening as he imagined. It has elongated features, small eyes and is covered with a light-colored feathery coat. Augray offers Ransom some vegetables and cheese, which, he explains, comes from the milk of a yellow grazing animal which young sorns herd in the forests. Ransom realizes his earlier encounter with the giraffe-like creatures in the forest must have been these same animals. The sorn which came after them was not chasing Ransom after all, he realizes, but was simply a shepherd.

Ransom questions the sorn about the social structure of Malacandra, asking if the sorn rule over the hross. Augray answers that only Oyarsa rules, and no creatures rule over others. Ransom asks to hear more about Oyarsa, and learns Oyarsa is eternal, is everywhere, and is invisible, like an eldil.

Ransom and Augray discuss the eldil, and how they are able to move through time and space. Augray questions whether there are eldil on Ransom's home planet. Ransom is not sure, and wonders if perhaps ancient Earth legends of light-like creatures might be based on eldil. He tells Augray his planet has no Oyarsa. This, Augray says, proves that Ransom comes from Thulcandra, the silent planet.

Ransom is not certain the planet called Thulcandra is actually the Earth. Augray invites him into a kind of observatory to show Ransom the planet through a telescope. Ransom realizes it is Earth. The planet looks small and insignificant despite all its history, Ransom feels. He is filled with bleakness.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

The theme of Ransom's fear of the unknown comes to a peak in Chapter 15, when he calmly meets a sorn, unafraid. He realizes that the sorn he encountered earlier, which he thought was stalking him, was actually just a gentle shepherd. He is not completely incautious, though, as he quickly remembers the terrible Cyclops in Homer's tale *The Odyssey* was also a shepherd.

Ransom learns a great deal from the sorn about the history of Malacandra and the nature of Oyarsa. Perhaps more importantly, he confirms that Thulcandra, the silent planet, is the Earth. Ransom is realizing the history of the Earth and the history of Malacandra are somehow connected. This connection will be revealed in following

chapters. Augray also mentions two other planets, Perelandra and Glundandra, of which he seems to have some knowledge.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

Ransom awakes in Augray's Tower feeling relieved, like a great burden has been lifted. He met a sorn, the source of much of his fear since landing on Malacandra, and was not afraid. Only one mystery remains, Ransom thinks, Oyarsa.

Augray feeds Ransom and says he will carry Ransom to Meldilorn. To counter the thin air, he gives Ransom a tank of oxygen to breathe. He explains the sorn invented the device and the pfilfriggi built it for them.

Ransom rides on Augray's shoulder and as they walk Augray tells him more of the history of Malacandra. A race of birds once lived on the planet, Augray says, but they are long extinct and the forests they once lived in now fossilized. They pass the caverns of many other sorns, some of whom greet them as they pass. As Ransom becomes more familiar with the sorns, he changes his original opinion of them as ogres.

Augray takes Ransom to the home of a sorn to stop for the night. It is some kind of school, Ransom determines, as the host seems to have several other sorns as pupils. These sorns question Ransom at great length about the Earth and its geology, life forms, politics and history. Ransom's description of war, slavery and other parts of human history astonish the sorns. They determine these things are only possible because Thulcandra has no Oyarsa.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

Ransom learns more about the sorn in this chapter. They are greatly interested in knowledge, and are able to deduce much about the Earth from Ransom's limited descriptions of it.

The character of the narrator appears towards the end of this chapter. Most of the exposition to this point has been told from the viewpoint of Ransom, in the third person. The reader only has insight into the thoughts of Ransom. The thoughts of other characters are only revealed by their words or actions as observed by Ransom. For a short section in Chapter 16, however, the narration switches to the second person as the narrator tells the reader about the two things that the sorns found especially interesting about the earth. In this section the reader is given insight into the sorns thoughts, even though they are not expressed to Ransom. This temporary shift in point of view gives a hint to the reader that the narrator is actually part of the story. This will become apparent at the end of the novel.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

The following day, Ransom and Augray resume their journey toward Meldilorn. The path begins to descend and Ransom first views Meldilorn from high above it. It is a sloping island in a circular lake. At the top of the island is a grove of very high, flowering trees. At the base of the trees, Ransom can make out what appears to be stone structures.

Augray takes Ransom to the edge of the lake, where a large gong hangs. Augray strikes the gong and they see a ferryboat depart from the shore of the island, manned by a hross. Augray asks the hross to take Ransom to Oyarsa. Augray says he will not be crossing because Oyarsa has not called for him.

Ransom gives Augray his wristwatch as a gift of thanks. Augray is pleased by the device, but declines it, telling Ransom to give it to the pfifltriggi, because they will be able to use it better than he.

Ransom boards the boat with the hross and relaxes during the journey across the lake. He finds out from the hross that all three races of Malacandra send people to Meldilorn to serve Oyarsa, and the hross, being experts at boats, are chosen to run the ferry. The hross tells Ransom that upon reaching Meldilorn, he may wander about as he wishes and will be called by Oyarsa when it is time.

Ransom walks leisurely around the entire island. He is aware, through strange flickering changes in the light, that the place is filled with eldil, but he cannot see any directly. After circling the island, Ransom sits to rest and watches as a parade of visitors crosses the lake to the island. After a time, he resumes walking.

Ransom makes his way to the edge of the grove, where some stone monuments line a broad avenue. The monuments are carved with images depicting the creation of Malacandra, which interest him. He also discovers a representation of the solar system showing the planets Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars. Mercury and Venus each are depicted with a fiery winged figure above them. The Earth, however, has a section removed from the stone where the figure would have appeared. Mars is depicted with scenes from Malacandra, confirming to Ransom he is on Mars.

Ransom is interrupted by a tapping sound, which he investigates. It turns out to be a pfifltriggi, who is carving a portrait of Ransom on one of the monuments. He converses with the creature and learns about that race. The pfifltriggi live in houses made of stone, silver and gold, he is told, and in pfifltriggi society, the females are dominant. Ransom learns each race has its own language, but they have all adopted the hross language for common communication.



## Chapter 17 Analysis

In Chapter 17, it is confirmed Ransom is on the planet Mars. The interconnected history of the Earth and Mars is revealed further by the monuments Ransom examines. He is surprised to find the figure associated with Venus is female, similar to the ancient Earth legend.

The pffltriggi are described in further detail for the first time in Chapter 17. While the author goes into some detail about the hross and the sorn, he describes the pffltriggi relatively briefly. Most of what the reader learns about them comes in this chapter. Later, in the postscript supposedly written by Ransom, the author explains Ransom considered creating a fictional account of a visit to the pffltriggi, but thought better of it.

Ransom's wristwatch reappears as a symbol of human inventiveness. Ransom seems to realize it is useless to him on Malacandra, and his offer to give it away seems itself symbolic. When the sorn is surprised that humans should need such a device to track the course of a day, the author emphasizes how "out of touch" humanity is.



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

That night, Ransom sleeps in a guesthouse filled with creatures of all three types of Malacandrian. They spend their time telling stories and making jokes. While Ransom understands the words of the jokes, he does not understand their humor.

He awakens very early the next morning to the voice of an eldil summoning him to Oyarsa. Dressing rapidly, Ransom is anxious about the meeting, although not afraid. He makes his way to the top of the island, where he finds a great number of Malacandrians lining either side of the broad avenue. The sky is filled with eldil. He stops in the center and says nothing. Everyone is silent.

After waiting a long while in silence, Ransom becomes aware of a sound of motion and sees all the creatures standing and bowing their heads. He is aware that Oyarsa is coming, although he cannot fully see him. His fingers begin to tingle and he feels weak.

Oyarsa asks Ransom what he is afraid of. He responds he is afraid of Oyarsa. Oyarsa responds that Ransom's fear has caused his own troubles, and he need not be afraid. Oyarsa reveals he sent the hnakra to free Ransom from Weston and Devine in the hope Ransom would come to Oyarsa. He chastises Ransom for hiding among the hross and not coming to him sooner. Oyarsa tells him his eldil have been watching him since he left earth. Ransom discovers it is Oyarsa who told the sorns to have Weston and Devine bring someone from Earth to Malacandra.

Oyarsa explains the history of Thulcandra to Ransom. Thulcandra once had an Oyarsa, but he turned bad. He devastated the Earth's moon and brought extinction to the creatures of Malacandra. As punishment, Maleldil banished him to Thulcandra, where he could not be heard from. This is why the planet is silent, Oyarsa says.

Oyarsa explains to Ransom that Weston and Devine visited the planet four years earlier. The sorns came to them and tried to teach them, but they were not willing to learn about Malacandra. They were only interested in gathering gold wherever they went. The sorns asked them to come to Oyarsa, but they would not come. Oyarsa told the sorns to tell the men that unless they brought a person from Thulcandra to him, they could take no more gold. The men filled their pockets and left.

The motives of Weston and Devine are now clear to Ransom. He explains he was brought against his will, and thought he was to be sacrificed by the sorns. Ransom tries to account for the actions of Weston and Devine to Oyarsa, and warns him they are dangerous. Oyarsa responds they are not dangerous to him.

Oyarsa asks Ransom to tell him about Thulcandra, but just as he is beginning he is interrupted by a procession of hross who seem to be carrying something.



## Chapter 18 Analysis

Chapter 18 is the high point in the action of the novel. Ransom's journey from Earth has led him to the central point on the planet Malacandra, Meldilorn, to meet with Oyarsa, the godlike ruler of the planet. Much of the motivation and background of the story is revealed to Ransom and to the reader in this chapter.

Ransom learns exactly why Weston and Devine kidnapped him and brought him to Malacandra. He also learns, through his eldil, that Oyarsa has been aware of him since before he landed and has even instigated some of the events from earlier in the story, such as the hnakra attack on the three men.

Ransom is not afraid of Oyarsa, and is treated with complete respect because of his lack of fear.



# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

The procession of hross enters carrying three dead hross in bundles and leading two prisoners. At first Ransom does not recognize the prisoners even as men, so accustomed has he become to looking at the creatures of Malacandra. He suddenly realizes that it is Weston and Devine. They do not notice Ransom.

One of the hross addresses Oyarsa, explaining that two of the hross were killed while the hross were capturing the men. The third was Hyoi, who was killed in cold blood.

Oyarsa demands to know why the men have killed the hross. Unable to see where the voice of Oyarsa is coming from, Weston thinks it is a ventriloquist trick. He makes a fool of himself addressing his response to a sleeping hross in the crowd, who he guesses must be the real source of the voice. Unaware of the situation, Weston tries to intimidate the crowd. He speaks in simple, condescending words, threatening to kill everyone unless they are freed. As a last resort, Weston pulls out a string of cheap beads, offering to trade. The crowd roars in laughter. Weston mistakes this for a sign of low intelligence. He attempts to blame Ransom for the deaths.

Oyarsa asks Ransom if the men are mentally deranged. Ransom explains to Oyarsa that the men do not believe Oyarsa is there. Ransom warns Weston that Oyarsa is real, and he should stop acting silly. Weston does not believe him. Oyarsa orders Weston to be taken away to have his head dunked in cold water.

Oyarsa turns his attention to the three dead hross. All the creatures begin singing a funeral song in honor of the dead. Following the song, a pfifltriggi touches each body with a crystal and the bodies disappear in a flash of blinding light. Ransom stands in silent remembrance of Hyoi as Weston is brought back, led by several guards.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

Weston and Devine return to the story after being absent for much of it. Weston's attitude of superiority now looks absolutely foolish to Ransom, knowing what he knows about Malacandra. Weston's antics, and Oyarsa's orders to have his head dunked, add a humorous touch to the story.

That Ransom has become almost fully adapted to living on Malacandra is demonstrated when he fails to recognize Weston and Devine even as men when he first sees them. They appear as odd creatures to Ransom, who has grown accustomed to the faces and shapes of sorns and hross.





# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

Weston returns, dripping wet and furious. Oyarsa, who chastises him severely for treating the Malacandrians like animals and for wrongfully kidnapping Ransom, silences him. Oyarsa says he is reluctant to kill Weston because he is not from Malacandra. He gives Weston a chance to speak in his defense.

Weston responds he is not afraid to die, and that others would follow from Earth and take over the planet. Devine interrupts him to plead with Oyarsa that all they want is gold, and if Oyarsa lets them have it they will leave and never return. Oyarsa silences him.

Weston continues, with Ransom translating. He tells Oyarsa that Earth civilization is superior to Malacandra's because of its medicine, law, military and science. This gives it the right to take over Malacandra. He says that even though he might himself die, one day man will move from planet to planet, advancing civilization wherever he goes by overtaking lower life forms. This is his noble cause, he tells Oyarsa.

Oyarsa understands Weston feels he acts out of his feeling of responsibility to humanity, which is indeed noble, but he challenges Weston's notion of what humanity really means. Weston has been "bent" Oyarsa tells him, by the "lord of the silent world." This has made him think his own race is the most important race, and the only one entitled to survive.

This "bent one," Oyarsa continues, has made men afraid of death, a fear which drives Weston to seek out ways to live on other planets. The Malacandrians do not fear death, Oyarsa explains, and so have peace. Weston defies Oyarsa and says that if there is indeed a "bent" lord of Earth, he is at least a lord of action, not simply of words, and Weston is on his side.

Oyarsa cuts the conversation off, saying he will not kill Weston or Devine, but they must return to Earth in their space ship the following day. Until that time, he intends to learn as much about the Earth as he can from Ransom.

Weston explains to Oyarsa that the positions of the planets would make a journey back to Earth at that time almost too far to be made. Oyarsa explains that he will provide food and air for ninety days, after which time he will disintegrate the ship. He has Weston and Devine led away, and asks Ransom to stay and speak with him.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

Weston's grand scheme is revealed in this chapter, much of which consists of his pompous speeches on the natural superiority of man and his responsibility to humanity.

The author has set the stage so that Weston's words, which are not very different from the actual opinions of many British people at the time the book was written, sound ridiculous and absurd. By having them spoken outside of an earthly context among people who have never found need to dominate their neighbors or go to war, the author points out how absurd Weston's argument is.

The theme of fear is brought to fruition as Oyarsa explains that fear, especially the fear of death, is the source of Weston's corruption. It is Ransom, the man who has overcome his fear, including his fear of death, who has been chosen by Oyarsa as the representative of Earth.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

Ransom and Oyarsa spend the day in conversation. Oyarsa thanks him for teaching him so much, and offers to let Ransom stay on Malacandra. Ransom decides he must return to Earth. Oyarsa tells him his eldil will be present on the ship with him and will not allow the other two to harm him.

Oyarsa commands Ransom to watch Weston and Devine should they reach the Earth again. He tells Ransom it has been prophesied that contact with Thulcandra will be open again soon, and they may meet again one day.

The following day, the three men pass through a large crowd of Malacandrians to their ship. Weston and Devine discover all weapons have been removed from the ship. Weston warns the other two they must speak only in case of an emergency, and move only when necessary to preserve air.

Ransom enters the ship and makes his way to his chamber. From the skylight, he watches the surface of Malacandra recede thousands of feet below him. He suddenly realizes the handramits he assumed were natural are actually artificially made.

Ransom resumes his routine on the ship, although he now has complete freedom to go anywhere, including the control room. He begins to make notes for a dictionary of the Malacandrian language, even though he imagines he will never reach Earth to complete it. He cannot see any eldil on the ship, owing to the bright sunlight, but he feels he can sense their presence.

To shorten their trip to Earth as much as possible Weston plots a course which flies dangerously close to the sun. The heat inside the spacecraft becomes almost unbearable. Short on water, the men suffer from incredible thirst. They live through the ordeal and the temperature begins to decrease.

The men are transformed by the experience. As the days wear on, Weston allows Ransom to take his turn navigating the ship. By the 70th day, the Earth is close enough that they can make out the shapes of the continents. On the 87th day, as they approach the Earth, Weston realizes the Moon is on course to cross their path. Unable to get too close to the Moon, and unable to get any closer to the Earth, they move the ship out farther into space, understanding this probably means they will never reach Earth.

Knowing he will soon be dead, Ransom returns to his chamber. He is not afraid, now his death has become real to him, and is not something far off. He does not intend to fall asleep, but he does.



Ransom wakes to a strange sound. It is completely dark. For a moment, he cannot identify the strange drumming sound, but suddenly realizes it is the sound of rain on the hull of the ship. He is on Earth.

Ransom gropes his way out of the ship and out into the rainstorm. He is in a field, and begins walking away from the ship. After about half an hour, he sees a blinding light from the direction of the ship, and realizes it has disintegrated. He continues to stumble through the dark until he sees a faint light ahead and hears the voices of men. It is a pub. He walks in, walks up to the bar, and orders a pint of ale.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

Chapter 21 ends the tale of Ransom's journey and introduces a new mystery. Before saying farewell, Oyarsa hints that he and Ransom may meet again. Knowing what he now knows about the history of Earth and Malacandra, Ransom gains a new point of view on ancient Earth mythology, which he thinks may contain more truth than most people believe. This foreshadows the concluding chapters of the book, which strengthen this connection.

The ordeal of the space flight transforms the men. The prospect of death unites them in their desperation. The reader is not told how the ship manages to finally land on the Earth, or if Weston and Devine also survive. Oyarsa's words at the beginning of the chapter suggest perhaps eldil were involved.



# Chapter 22

## Chapter 22 Summary

The narrator takes over the story in this chapter and tells the reader he has a purpose in writing the book. He explains the professor in the story is a real person, although Ransom is not his actual name. Like Ransom, the narrator is a professor who was professionally acquainted with him.

The narrator learned the story from Ransom after writing him a letter asking about a Latin word he ran across in an obscure text. The word is Oyarses. The narrator asks Ransom if he is familiar with the word.

Ransom invites the narrator to a visit, during which he tells the narrator his entire story. Ever since, the narrator states, he and Ransom have been investigating the mystery of the connection between Earth and Malacandra, and the prophecy Oyarsa alluded to about dramatic events taking place in the near future.

The narrator and Ransom want to warn the world about the coming events and the intentions of the person the professor is calling Weston, but feel nobody would believe them.

It is Ransom's idea, the narrator says, to present the story as fiction so as to plant the seed in the minds of its readers of the reality of the forces at work.

The narrator alludes to current events which suggest events have already begun to progress, and that more of the story will be told in the future.

## Chapter 22 Analysis

The point of view shifts drastically to the narrator in this chapter, framing the fictional account of Ransom's journey with a supposedly factual account of how the story came to be told. This chapter adds a twist to the tale by adding another layer of fiction. This adds another dimension to the connection between the Earth and Malacandra.

The narrator also implies that Weston, at least, also survived the space ship flight to Earth and is currently at some kind of work related to the story and the mystery of the prophecy. Finally, the narrator sets the stage for the continuation of the story, which the author extends into two related novels.



# Postscript

## Postscript Summary

The postscript to the novel is presented as an excerpt from a letter by Ransom to Lewis, the narrator.

Ransom is writing after having read the narrator's account of his journey. He offers some corrections and expands on some of the descriptions in the story. He indicates he has tried to identify the handramit where he lived on maps of the surface of Mars, but cannot be certain of it.

Ransom also addresses some of the technical gaps in the story, such as how eldil can speak without having any bodies. He briefly describes two memories he cherishes which are not included in the story. One is a hross funeral, the other the memory of watching Jupiter rise over the asteroid belt. Jupiter, Ransom writes, holds some special place in the religion of Malacandra, and may play an important role in the coming events.

## Postscript Analysis

Like the preceding chapter, the postscript is presented in the first person. For the first time, Ransom is speaking for himself about his past experiences on Malacandra. His corrections and additions to the story, which, of course, are actually written by the author, add a further twist to the tale, and one gets the feeling the author is using the postscript to "clean up" some of the loose ends in the story.

The postscript, along with the final chapters which explain that Oyarsa and the eldil have been influencing events all along, invite to the reader to go back and re-read the book, tracing the threads which come together in Meldilorn



# Characters

## Dr. Elwin Ransom

Ransom, the primary character in the novel, is a tall man in his late 30's. He is a college professor at Cambridge University, one of the most prestigious schools in England. He is a professor of philology, the study of languages, and he becomes very curious about the language of the inhabitants of Malacandra, managing to learn to speak it fairly well. It is mentioned that Ransom served in the military during wartime, although not many details are given.

Ransom at first appears to somewhat mild-mannered, but often displays an intense, sometimes reckless curiosity. When he is kidnapped, he almost seems a willing captive at times, even as he plans to escape his captors or die trying. Ransom surprises even himself with his courage, as when he finds himself willingly at the front of a pack of hunters seeking a dangerous sea creature. Ransom's developing courage comes about partly from embracing his curiosity and losing his automatically fearful response to the unknown.

Ransom is an educated man, but the physicist Weston ridicules his education as impractical. In the final scenes of the books, however, the value of Ransom's education in languages becomes clear, as he is able to communicate with the inhabitants of Malacandra while the more "practical" Weston can only babble.

Ransom is also a philosophical man, occasionally drifting into deep sessions of thought. He is prone to vivid dreams, one of which seems to be a premonition of his ultimate adventure.

Ransom's curiosity and courage serve him well among the peoples of Malacandra, earning him their ultimate respect.

## Weston

Weston is a brilliant physicist who has developed a spaceship capable of traveling to Mars and back. Weston feels humans are superior to the races of creatures on Malacandra/Mars, and feels himself to be superior among humans. This motivates him to see Malacandra as an opportunity to advance humanity by subjugating and exploiting the planet. He is not above using questionable tactics to achieve his goals, including kidnapping and murder. His superior intellect and what he feels is a noble cause to humanity justify such actions in his own mind.

Weston, along with Devine, kidnaps Ransom and takes him to Malacandra, where he thinks he is to hand him over to the sorns for some kind of sacrifice. Weston's belief that the Malacandrians are inferior to humans clouds his ability to judge their intentions, which are not to kill or harm the humans but to welcome them. When Weston is called



before Oyarsa, the ruler of Malacandra, his superior attitude and condescending speeches make him look ridiculous, as Oyarsa is obviously the wiser and more intelligent of the two.

## Devine

Devine is a wealthy English gentleman. Outwardly, Devine is friendly and jovial, but his actions display a more sinister character motivated by greed. He is bankrolling Weston's research and the construction of his spaceship so he can exploit the vast amounts of gold and other precious things found on Malacandra. He shows no interest in Weston's grand scheme, and is only interested in getting rich.

Devine and Ransom were schoolmates as boys, and this connection at first causes Ransom to trust Devine. Devine is without morals, however, and shows no hesitation in kidnapping Ransom and handing him over to the sorns.

## Hyoï

Hyoï is a Malacandran creature known as a hross. Ransom meets Hyoï at the edge of a lake while running from Weston and Devine, and soon discovers the creature is intelligent and uses language. Hyoï takes Ransom to live among other hross.

Hyoï and Ransom together kill the dangerous hnakra in a ritual hunt. Shortly afterward, Hyoï is shot and killed by Weston.

## Oyarsa

Oyarsa is the ruler of Malacandra. He lives on the island of Meldilorn, where he is served by creatures from the three groups of intelligent inhabitants of the planet. Oyarsa is also served by invisible messengers called eldil.

Oyarsa has the ability to travel through time and space, and to create and destroy matter. Through his eldil, he can invisibly affect the course of events and protect people from harm.

Oyarsa is the name of this powerful ruler, but also appears to be used as a form of title. It is mentioned that the Earth also has an Oyarsa, but he has not been heard from in many centuries.

## Augray

Augray is a sorn, an 18-foot-high humanoid creature. He lives in a cavernous mountain tower along the road to Meldilorn. Augray assists Ransom on his journey to the island of Meldilorn by giving him shelter and carrying him to the edge of the lake surrounding the





island. Augray has a sort of astronomical observatory in his tower, which he uses to show Ransom the Earth. This confirms for Ransom that Earth is the same planet as the one the Malcandrians call Thulcandra, meaning the silent planet.

## Hnohra

Hnohra is an elder hross who teaches Ransom the common language of the inhabitants of Malacandra. It is Hnohra who first explains to Ransom about the different creatures of Malacandra and the story of their creation, and who first asks him about where he comes from. From Hnohra, Ransom learns the inhabitants of Malacandra have an advanced knowledge of astronomy. Although Ransom does not know it at the time, Hnohra points out Earth to him in the night sky.

## Kanakaberaka

Kanakaberaka is one of the froglike pfiltriggi who live on Malacandra. The pfiltriggi are masters at working in gold, silver and stone, and Kanakaberaka carries dozens of instruments strung about his body for this purpose. Ransom meets Kanakaberaka on the island of Meldilorn, where the pfiltriggi is engaged in carving Ransom's portrait on a stone monument to record his visit.

## Whin

Whin is a hross who, along with Hyoui and Ransom, kills the deadly hnakra. He teaches Ransom the way to reach Meldilorn.

## Harry

Harry is a boy who tends the furnace at The Rise, the farm where Devine and Weston live in the English countryside, and where Weston has built his spaceship. Ransom's initial reason for going to The Rise is to inquire about Harry for the boy's worried mother. Ransom interrupts Devine and Weston in the act of kidnapping Harry to take him with them in the spaceship. They eventually let him go and kidnap Ransom in his place.

## Lewis

Lewis is the narrator of the novel, and is the fictional counterpart of C.S. Lewis, the author. The character Lewis claims to have written the novel based on actual facts provided by Professor Ransom, supposedly not the Professor's real name. Lewis gives a twist to the end of the novel by giving it a connection to the real world.

While Lewis is mainly invisible throughout the narration, he sometimes interjects his presence by describing events outside the story line.

## The Eldil

The Eldil are the messengers and servants of Oyarsa. Like him, they are nearly invisible. At first, Ransom is not able to see or hear the eldil, but gradually begins to be aware of their presence until they are able to communicate with him directly. The eldil, Ransom learns, are present on Earth and were responsible for his being chosen to journey to Malacandra. The eldil also provide Ransom with protection on his journey back to Earth.



# Objects/Places

## Malacandra

Malacandra is the planet Mars.

## Meldilorn

The island home of Oyarsa, the invisible ruler of Malacandra. Creatures of all types live in Meldilorn, serving Oyarsa. There are stone carvings depicting the history of the planet.

## Maleldil the Young

In the lore of Malacandra, the creator and ruler of the world. Maleldil lives with another great entity called The Old One.

## Thulcandra

Thulcandra is the name the inhabitants give to Earth. It means "silent planet."

## Handramit

Handramits are the deep canyons which criss-cross the surface of Malacandra. The creatures called hross live in the handramits.

## Harandra

The higher elevations of Malacandra are called harandra. The sorns live in the harandra.

## Hnau

Hnau is the Malacandrian word for an intelligent creature. The hross, sorns and pffltriggi are the three types of hnau living on Malacandra.

## Weston's spaceship

Professor Weston's spacecraft is a metallic sphere propelled by solar radiation.



## **Augray's Tower**

The cavernous home of the sorn, Augray. Augray possesses a kind of telescope, through which he shows Ransom the Earth.

## **Hnakra**

A vicious black creature with huge jaws which lives in the waters of Malacandra. The hnakra is traditionally hunted by the hross creatures.

## **The Rise**

The run-down farm in the English countryside where Devine and Weston live, and where Weston has built his space ship.

## **Honodraskrud**

An edible pinkish weed that grows on Malacandra.



## Social Concerns And Themes

Out of the Silent Planet depicts the cosmic significance of the individual's choices, the evils of social engineering, the absurdity of racism, and the limitations of man's appropriate power without mentioning any of these words. Lewis presents a Pedestrian, a vacationing don named Ransom, whose everyman title and mixed motives make him believable. His decent responses to the alien good and the familiar evil engage the reader's sympathy. For example, when Ransom acts as a translator for the evil scientist's plans for the universe by placing Weston's bombastic scientism in words prelapsarian creatures can understand, Lewis is able to strip bare the ultimate banality of the evil implicit in these plans.

In this novel, then, Lewis indicts those modern movements which have resulted in pogroms, concentration camps, total war, and totalitarianism: social Darwinism, militant materialism, moral relativism. Against the reduction of human beings to integers arrangeable at the whim of scientific rulers, Lewis presents man's supernatural nature and destiny, his being part of a creation of love and freedom. In his coining the word *hnau* to mean all rational creatures regardless of their morphology, Lewis affirms the absolute dignity of humankind regardless of race, nationality, or limitations.



## Techniques

As is the case with any fantasy novel, Lewis must establish verisimilitude as the work begins and sustain it throughout the narrative. He uses psychological verisimilitude, analogies, vivid imagery, mythic allusions, and an epilogue in order to gain credence. Still another technique which he employs is typical British humor, e.g., when Ransom is lost in the Malacandrian world, the narrator comments that Ransom has nothing to fear, "except the fact of wandering unprovisioned and alone in a forest of unknown vegetation thousands or millions of miles beyond the reach or knowledge of man."

The narrative technique is effective in achieving verisimilitude. The point of view is third-person, limited omniscient. The intrusive narrator not only speaks directly to the reader in the body of the story (chapters S. 7, and 9); he uses chapter 22 as an epilogue during which he tells that Ransom is not the protagonist's real name (Lewis changes his mind about that point in *Perelandra*, 1943) and quotes from a letter to him from Dr. Ransom. Moreover, he adds a postscript which is ostensibly another letter from Ransom in which he describes in greater detail some of the Malacandrian scenes as well as observing that space travel is probably over.

Finally, Lewis's use of archetypes adds to the depth of the novel. He employs the rite of passage to structure the novel, using each one of Ransom's separations to prepare for an ordeal which is successfully completed and which results in his growth—morally, experientially, even physically. A clear instance is the hnakra hunt, significant because of its anthropological echoes and because of its outcome. Of equal importance are the archetypal descriptions of light, particularly those which occur during the journeys in space. The sense of a light-filled, life-filled space dominates Lewis's depiction of the journeys to and from Mars. Just as all of the elements of the novel are welded together to form a whole, so do the archetypes serve to reinforce characterization, intensify plot, and communicate themes.



# Themes

## Courage

At the beginning of the novel, Ransom is presented as a somewhat mild-mannered professor enjoying a walk through the English countryside. By the end of the tale, Ransom has been transformed into a man unafraid of death. This transformation takes place over the course of the novel in a series of events which reveal Ransom's assessment of his own courage and his willingness to face danger.

The first suggestion that Ransom might be braver than he believes himself to be is when he forces his way into The Rise and interrupts Weston and Devine attempting to kidnap young Harry. Later, after Ransom himself has been kidnapped, he contemplates his own fear and actually finds it exhilarating in a sense. After overhearing Devine's comment about the sorn, this fear grips him. He spends most of his time on Malacandra running or hiding from the sorn, imagining them to be terrible creatures intent on killing him.

It is the hnakra hunt which fully awakens Ransom to the depth of his own fear and courage. Following the killing of the beast, Ransom feels he has finally "grown up."

Ransom eventually learns the sorn are peaceful, intelligent beings which never had any intention of harming him. As Oyarsa explains to him at the end of the novel, it was Ransom's fear of the unknown which indirectly led to the death of Hyoui and delayed Ransom's meeting of Oyarsa. Oyarsa also explains that fear of death is what has driven Weston and others like him to seek to ensure humanity will live forever, by conquering other worlds if necessary. The lack of fear of death, Oyarsa tell Ransom, is what allows the very different people of Malacandra to live together peacefully.

## Racism and Colonialism

The British Empire, at its peak in the late 19th Century, had colonies around the world. Beginning in the first half of the 20th Century, many of these colonies began independence movements to gain control of their own government. These movements, such as the one led by Mohandas Gandhi in India, proved to be successful in the years following World War II. India gained independence in 1948.

At the time C.S. Lewis wrote *Out of the Silent Planet*, in the early 1940's, the subject of colonization and Britain's role in the world was a topic of much discussion. The attitude of the character Weston is an example of how many British people felt about less developed cultures during the height of colonial expansion. Many felt Britain's advanced military, medicine and science gave it the right and even the responsibility to rule over people who were not as advanced. This attitude is closely tied to racism, as many of Britain's colonial territories were in Africa and Asia. The perceived responsibility to rule over other peoples was sometimes referred to as the "White Man's Burden," a phrase



the character Devine uses in the novel. It was up to white men, they thought, to bring civilization to the other races of the world.

This attitude is the same which Weston holds toward Malacandra and its people. He feels that because they are so different, they must be inferior. Ransom also struggles with this perception, and is continually puzzled that Malacandra has no one dominant race of people, as he feels the Earth does. At one point, as the hross are teaching him about the legends of how their planet was created, Ransom even feels he has a responsibility to teach them to follow Christianity.

Ransom learns to overcome his prejudice, but Weston does not. At the end of the novel, Weston appears to be insane to the Malacandrians as he speaks down to them and blusters about the responsibility of humans to take over the planet one day. He also appears ridiculous to the reader, because of what the author has revealed about the true intelligence of Oyarsa and the other peoples of Malacandra.

## Christianity

C.S. Lewis converted to Christianity as an adult, and focused much of his writing on religious subjects. Thus, it is not surprising to find a religious theme running through *Out of the Silent Planet*. The author's imagined hierarchy of invisible creatures of light closely parallels the angels and archangels of the Christian tradition. Malacandra's belief in one omnipotent God who is present everywhere also resonates with Christianity.

The traditional Christian tale of the fall of Lucifer tells how the archangel Lucifer rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven to the Earth, cut off from God. The story Ransom is told by Oyarsa is the same story. The Oyarsa of Earth, or the silent planet as it is called, rebelled against Maleldil and was confined to the Earth. From what Ransom is able to tell Oyarsa on Malacandra, Oyarsa deduces that this lord of Earth has corrupted its people by introducing the fear of death.

Lewis does not intend to suggest his fictional novel is a literal description of the nature of God, Satan and heaven, but by connecting his imagined worlds with the Christian tradition, Lewis connects the ideals he expresses in the story with his religious beliefs.





# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written mostly in the third person, from the point of view of a narrator with insight into the thoughts and motivations of the main character Ransom. The narration is mostly descriptive, but the narrator is also sometimes present in the story, as when he refers to events which take place outside the main story line. At the end of the book, the narrator takes over the story entirely and explains how he knows the main character personally and how he came to write the story based on the actual experiences of the main character. In the final chapter, the point of view shifts to the first person in the form of an excerpt from a letter written by Ransom to the narrator.

By shifting the points of view at the end of the novel, the author adds another layer of fiction to the story. By giving the character of the narrator his own name, Lewis, the author uses this extra layer of fiction to impart a sense of authenticity to the tale.

This shift also brings the story into the present day. The narrator makes reference to events the reader will supposedly be familiar with and which are related to the mystery unveiled in the novel. As this novel is the first in a trilogy of related books, the change in point of view provides a link to the next installment in the tale, and creates a framework on which the entire saga hangs.

## Setting

The story begins and ends in the English countryside, but most of the action takes place on the planet Mars, or Malacandra as its inhabitants call it. Mars is inhabited by three primary intelligent creatures, the seal-like hrossa, the giant humanoid sorns, and the froglike pffltriggi. These three peoples live harmoniously with one another under the reign of an invisible leader called Oyarsa. Oyarsa lives on an island called Meldilorn, and communicates both directly and through eldil, his invisible messengers which can quickly travel through time and space.

Malacandra is described as having very high, elongated mountain peaks as well as deep, straight canyons. Pink foliage covers the ground in many places, and large purple plants grow high into the sky in strange shapes. Warm blue water runs in many streams and gullies, and pools into large lakes.

During the journeys between Earth and Malacandra, the setting shifts to the spaceship built by Weston. The ship is spherical in shape, with compartments built around a hollow core. This gives the rooms a strange geometry which seems to continually shift. There are basic living quarters, a galley, and a control room. Much of the ship is constantly awash in very bright sunlight as it travels through space. Because of the extreme heat, the three travelers strip nude. To counter weightlessness, they wear belts with weights



attached. Most of the ship's compartments are empty, to be used to transport gold from Malacandra to Earth.

The author takes great effort to describe the strange settings in the novel. Stories set on Earth can include shorter descriptions which rely on the reader being familiar with common settings. Every reader can imagine a crowded city sidewalk or a secluded country road, for instance, so an author need not spend too much time describing these things to create a realistic setting. Most of this novel takes place in completely imaginary settings, however, and the author must go into some detail to bring the settings to life for the reader. The author occasionally spends entire chapters describing the surroundings and including very little action.

## Language and Meaning

The author gives a great deal of attention to descriptions of the strange landscape and inhabitants of Malacandra. This creates an unfamiliar setting for the reader, and accentuates the isolation and fear of the unknown felt by the main character. Details about the planet are not revealed to the reader until they are actually discovered by Ransom, creating the sense that the reader is exploring the strange new planet alongside him. The story is narrated from Ransom's point of view, and much of the action is advanced through dialogue.

The author also treats language as a separate subject within the book, by making Ransom a linguistics professor. He goes into detail about the structure of the language used by the Malacandrians. Ransom's ability to learn the language of the Malacandrians plays an important role in the character's development throughout the book. At the end of the book, it is a similarity between a Malacandrian word and a word discovered in an old Latin text on Earth which links the history of the two planets in Ransom's mind.

C.S. Lewis was from Ireland and lived and wrote in England using British English. Many of the expressions and idioms used in the novel are from British English. Lewis even pokes a little fun at British English in his description of the Malacandrian language. The sorn, who are the educated class of creatures, do not pronounce the initial H that appears at the beginning of many words. This is exactly opposite from Britain, where it is the working classes who drop the H, as when pronouncing the name Harry as 'arry.

One tradition in English literature which dates at least as far back as Shakespeare is to give characters names suggestive of their personal character, appearance or role in the story. Charles Dickens is well known for this practice as well. At one point in the novel, C.S. Lewis hints he might be following this tradition himself, when a character explains that the names of the creatures on Malacandra match their physical descriptions. The giant sorn have grand sounding names, for instance.

This suggests the names Ransom, Weston and Devine may hold some meaning within the story. One obvious definition of "ransom" is the price paid to release someone who has been kidnapped. Of course it is Ransom himself who is kidnapped, and serves as



his own "ransom." Weston personifies the colonial racism practiced by the Western colonial powers over much of Africa and Asia, and his name may allude to those powers. Devine almost seems a play on words, meaning both "of the vine" and "divine." This combination of godliness and a love for wine suggests a figure like Bacchus, the Roman god of wine, who represents personal appetite and drunkenness. Devine certainly fits this description.

## Structure

The novel is divided into 22 short numbered chapters and a postscript. It is structured as a classic journey or quest story, where the main character leaves home, travels through a strange land encountering danger and adventure along the way, then returns home transformed from his journey. To this basic form, the author adds some additional material to make the novel seem like a recounting of actual events rather than complete fiction.

The novel also follows many conventions of science fiction, including fantastic creatures with strange customs. Like much science fiction, the author makes an attempt to base his speculations in fact. For example, the straight, deep canyons he observes on Mars correspond with the long straight lines observed on the planet's surface through telescopes. Some early astronomers suggested these lines might even be canals, built by Martians. Lewis' description of space travel, while quite different than we know it to be today, is based on the actual physics of gravity.

The inclusion of several short chapters allows the author to break the extensive descriptions of the imaginary settings into short episodes which do not interrupt the action too much. Many of the chapters begin or end with Ransom waking or sleeping, providing a natural introduction or break to the action.

The novel is also presented as a political allegory with connections to the world situation at the time it was written, as well as a religious allegory with parallels to Christian traditions. These connections and parallels are developed gradually throughout the novel so they have a greater impact when they are revealed at the end of the book. The revelation that these threads have been running through the story invites the reader to re-read the book and retrace the threads.



## Quotes

"He walked fairly fast, and doggedly, without looking much about him, like a man trying to shorten the way with some interesting train of thought. He was tall, but a little round-shouldered, about thirty-five to forty years of age, and dressed with that particular kind of shabbiness which marks a member of the intelligentsia on a holiday." Chapter 1, p. 7.

"Ransom was by now thoroughly frightened—not with the prosaic fright that a man suffers in a war, but with a heady, bounding kind of fear that was hardly distinguishable from his general excitement; he was poised on a sort of emotional watershed from which, he felt, he might at any moment pass into delirious terror or into an ecstasy of joy." Chapter 3, p. 23.

"Like many men of his own age, he rather underestimated than overestimated his own courage; the gap between boyhood's dreams and his actual experience of the War had been startling, and his subsequent view of his own unheroic qualities had perhaps swung too far in the opposite direction." Chapter 6, p. 37.

"His first impression was of a bright pale world—a water-colour world out of a child's paint-box; a moment later he recognized the flat belt of light blue as a sheet of water, which came nearly to his feet. They were on the shore of a lake or river." Chapter 7, p. 42.

"The creature, which was still steaming and shaking itself on the back and had obviously not seen him, opened its mouth and began to make noises. This in itself was not remarkable; but a lifetime of linguistic study assured Ransom almost at once that these were articulate noises. The creature was talking." Chapter 9, p. 55.

"They seemed to have no arts except a kind of poetry and music which was practiced almost every evening by a team of four hrossa. One recited half chanting at great length while the other three, sometimes singly and sometimes antiphonally, interrupted him from time to time with song." Chapter 11, p.66.

"He came into the mouth of the cave and then, unsteadily, round the fire and into the interior, and stood still blinking in the light. When at least he could see, he discerned a smooth chamber of green rock, very lofty. There were two things in it. One of them, dancing on the wall and roof, was the huge, angular shadow of a sorn; the other, crouched beneath it, was the sorn himself." Chapter 14, p. 90.

"Ransom awoke next morning with the vague feeling that a great weight had been taken off his mind. Then he remembered that he was the guest of a sorn and that the creature he had been avoiding ever since he landed had turned out to be as amicable as the hrossa, though he was far from feeling the same affection for it. Nothing then remained to be afraid of in Malacandra except Oyarsa... 'The last fence,' thought Ransom." Chapter 16, p. 97.



"He was breathing freely. His toes, so long benumbed, could move delightfully inside his boots. He lifted the ear-flaps of his cap and found his ears instantly filled with the sound of falling water. And now he was treading on soft ground-weed over level earth and forest roof was above his head. They had conquered the harandra and were on the threshold of Meldilorn." Chapter 17, pp. 105-106.

"Oyarsa spoke—a more unhuman voice than Ransom had yet heard, sweet and seemingly remote; an unshaken voice; a voice, as one of the hrossa afterwards said to Ransom, 'with no blood in it. Light is instead of blood for them.' The words were not alarming." Chapter 18, p. 119.

"He awoke in almost complete darkness in the midst of a loud continuous noise, which he could not at first identify. It reminded him of something—something he seemed to have heard in a previous existence. It was a prolonged drumming noise close above his head. Suddenly his heart gave a great leap. 'Oh God,' he sobbed. 'Oh God! It's rain!' He was on Earth." Chapter 21, p.150.

"It was Dr. Ransom who first saw that our only chance was to publish in the form of fiction what would certainly not be listened to as fact. He even thought—greatly overrating my literary powers—that this might have the incidental advantage of reaching a wider public, and that, certainly, it would reach a great many people sooner than 'Weston.'" Chapter 22, p. 153.



## Topics for Discussion

Out of the Silent Planet was written before the first manned space flight. How does C. S. Lewis' imagination of what space travel is like compare with what we know about space travel today? How does his description compare with earlier fictional imaginings of space travel, such as those by H.G. Wells?

At one point in the novel, the author indicates the names the creatures have on Malacandra are descriptive—the giant sorns have grand sounding names, for instance. What do the names of the human characters in the novel, Ransom, Weston and Devine, suggest about these characters and their roles in the story?

Discuss the importance of the language of Malacandra in the events of the story.

Malacandrian society is made up of three distinctly different but equal kinds of creatures, each with different roles to play in the overall society. Why do you think the author structured the society this way?

How does the author treat religion in the story?

Ransom, Weston and Devine are three distinctly different types of people. What human attributes does each represent? Does the author make any kind of judgment about these attributes?

Out of the Silent Planet was published in 1943. What historical events might have influenced the author's writing of this book and how might they relate to the characters and events in the story?

## Literary Precedents

The debt to Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) is apparent in several details of the novel: Ransom is a philologist, and Gulliver states he "had a great Facility by the Strength of my Memory . . . [for] learning . . . Language"; each comes to the lands unwillingly; each describes the beings with whom he comes into contact with great and prosaic detail; each uses analogy to explain the unfamiliar; each is commenting on his own time and place by describing places which are ultimately fantastic.

H. G. Wells is another literary influence on the novel. The vagueness of the physics needed in both *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938) and Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) and the protagonists' sighting earth from the spaceships are parallels. However, in substantial ways *Out of the Silent Planet* is a rejoinder to Wells's fantasies. For example, when Ransom is afraid, his fears are generally attributable to Wells; for example, in chapter 11 his hesitancy in explaining some things about earth is motivated by his remembering Cavor's end on the moon. Nonetheless, Lewis acknowledges his enjoyment of Wells's fantasies and his debts to them in a note prefixed to the opening chapter.

Moreover, Jules Verne, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Lucian, Kepler, Kircher, Dante, Tasso, Stapledon, Haldane, and David Lindsay are writers whose accounts of imaginary voyages influenced Lewis from boyhood on. Several of them are cited in letters discussing the composition of *Out of the Silent Planet*; he wrote in 1944 that "The real father of my planet books is David Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus*." But for all these influences, Lewis's work is the product of his fertile and image-making mind, a new combination of a thrilling science fiction novel and Christian apologetics.



## Related Titles

The adventures of Ransom continue in *Perelandra* and *That Hideous Strength* (1945). In the first Ransom is transported by a casketlike box to Perelandra, Venus. The mythopoesis of the novel is derived from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and the Genesis book of the Bible; however, the conclusion is Lewis's own, his creation of a tempted world which does not fall, one in which the newest hnuua, emerald-colored humans, assume the rulership of their planet from its angelic Oyarsa. At the heart of the story is Ransom's terrifying battle with the dead Weston, Un-Man. Lewis employs epic echoes and archetypal patterns as he presents Ransom's development from unwilling hero to epic protagonist. Lewis uses the same third-person limited omniscient intrusive narrator as in the first novel. Moreover, he frames the Venus story with an account of the narrator's very own rite of passage complete with an ordeal which captures the terror which good as well as evil can effect.

The point of view of *That Hideous Strength* (1945), like its focus, changes.

Here a third-person omniscient narrator moves from scene to scene, from mind to mind, occasionally commenting on the significance of what he tells.

Rather than focusing on Ransom, the novel traces the parallel stories of a modern husband and wife, Mark and Jane Studdock. Appropriately subtitled "A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups," the novel is Lewis's "'tall story' about devilry, although it has behind it a serious 'point' which I have tried to make in my *Abolition of Man*." Lewis continues in his preface to state that the book "concludes" his space trilogy.

Mark, motivated by his passion to be in the ultimate inner circle, surrenders to the forces of evil in small steps until he is confronted with the ultimate temptation: to annihilate the good. At the same time as he regresses, readers view Jane as she joins the forces of good against her basic desire never to be drawn in, never to be caught by mystery or the other than rational.

Mark's alliance with the forces of the bent one of Thulcandra, N.I.C.E., leads him into a battle with the group led by Ransom at St. Anne's, which has taken Jane in. Merlin, prisons, a great bear, mice, scientists of every stripe, a living head, evil microbes, dream visions, and murder all play their roles in this theological thriller.





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