

The Horse and His Boy

by C. S. Lewis

Overview

Plot

Shasta escapes from his cruel master and flees to freedom in the northern countries of Narnia and Archenland, accompanied by Aravis the Calormene princess and Hwin and Bree, two talking horses from Narnia. Along the way, they uncover a plot by Rabadash, the Calormene prince, to conquer Archenland. They race to warn the Archenlanders and rally the Narnians to their aid.

Conflict

Can the fugitives warn the Archenlanders in time? (Man vs. Man, Man vs. Nature) Will Shasta find freedom? Will he find a home? Will he every really belong? (Man vs. Fate, Man vs. God) Will the characters learn humility? (Man vs. Self)

Setting

The mythical lands surrounding Narnia, including Calormen and Archenland.

Characters

Shasta, the long-lost prince of Archenland (though he doesn't know if yet!); Aravis, the Calormene princess; Hwin and Bree, the talking Narnian horses; Rabadash, the Calormene invader; Aslan the Lion

Theme

Friendship; Coming of age; Pride and Humility; Providence; the Nature of God

Questions About Structure: Setting

(1) Where does the story happen?

This story takes place in the fictional lands of Calormen and Narnia during the Golden Age of Narnia when Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy Pevensie still sit on the thrones of Cair Paravel after the events of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Chronologically, this tale occurs between between *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian*. Lewis wrote this book, however, after *The Silver Chair* and before *The Magician's Nephew*.

We meet Shasta in a tiny, Calormene town on the banks of a river. The servant of a fisherman, Shasta knows little of the world beyond the pungent squalor of the tiny hut they share. He spends his days mending nets and dreaming of the cool, open landscapes of free Narnia. Though he has heard stories of the marvelous life available in to all in Narnia, he little dreams of the liberty he will soon experience in that land. In contrast with Aslan's dominion, Calormene seems a vast, harsh, empire. Built on a strictly hierarchical model, Calormene society is dominated by an air of groveling and pandering to the upper classes. Readers observe this unpleasant result of the feudal system in Arsheesh's obsequious behavior towards the Calormene soldier who stays the night in the fisherman's hut.

Arsheesh knew by the gold on the stranger's bare arm that he was a Tarkaan or great lord, and he bowed kneeling before him till his beard touched the earth and made signs to Shasta to kneel also.

The stranger demanded hospitality for the night which of course the fisherman dared not refuse. All the best they had was set before the Tarkaan for supper (and he didn't think much of it) and Shasta, as always happened when the fisherman had company, was given a hunk of bread and turned out of the cottage. (p. 5)

While the Calormene lord may treat Arsheesh and Shasta in any way he pleases, the fisherman and Shasta are required, by virtue of their social status, to pander to his every wish and need.

This trait is common to Calormene society.

(1.d) What is the mood or atmosphere of the place where the story happens? Is it cheerful and sunny, or dark and bleak? What words or phrases or descriptions does the author use to create this sunny atmosphere?

Throughout this story, the setting reflects the conflict. While Shasta remains with Arsheesh, the setting is predominantly dreary, fishy, and constricting. When Shasta and his companions pass through Tashbaan, the atmosphere is as stifling as their precarious predicament. Indeed, an air of tense foreboding haunts the characters as they plot and attempt their escape, but the mood and the setting themselves grow lighter and freer as they draw nearer to Narnia. This increasing lightness suggests a connection in Lewis's world between religion and political or personal freedom. While the Calormene people worship an idol, Tash, whose laws are cruel and demanding, Narnians worship Aslan who leads them with gentle, loving firmness. The harsh contrast between these two religions corresponds with the differences in political and personal freedom in the two cultures. In Calormene, slavery thrives, but in Narnia freedom reigns.

(1.h) Among what kinds of people is the story set? What is their economic class? How do they live? Are they hopeful? Downtrodden? Depressed? Why?

Though the story begins among poor fishermen, the characters eventually befriend royalty. Shasta (the protagonist) is an orphan waif, but unlike the avaricious fisherman he lives with, he dreams of a life free from fishing, price haggling and poverty. He clings to the hope that one day he will escape to the hallowed, mysterious land of Narnia and there shake off his servitude forever. On his quest for this freedom, Shasta meets and befriends people from every social class (and species, given his relationships with Hwin and Bree, the talking horses) and bonds with those who share his hope for a new life in Narnia.

NOTES:

Questions About Structure: Characters

(3.a – 3.i) Who is the story about?

Shasta is a young Narnian boy of 10 or 11. Unlike his Calormene master, Arsheesh, he has fair hair and light skin, qualities inherited from his Narnian parents though Shasta is too young to have guessed his heritage. In addition to racial differences, these two are disparate in character. While Arsheesh is a harsh, violent, and wicked man, Shasta grows up gentle, kind, faithful, lonely, vulnerable, naive, and trusting. The personality differences between the two could not be starker, and as a result, it is a small wonder that Shasta soon questions his relation to his “father.”

(3.j) What does the character say about himself to other people?

Shasta’s thoughts on his master, Arsheesh, betray his laudable humility and self-awareness. Lewis presents Shasta’s feelings as follows: “He had often been uneasy because, try as he might, he had never been able to love the fisherman, and he knew that a boy ought to love his father. And now, apparently, he was no relation to Arsheesh at all. That took a great weight off his mind.” (p.8) Though he is concerned by his lack of feeling for the greasy fisherman, Shasta longs to better himself. He has been unable to work up any sort of affection for the fisherman over the years, because, after all, the fisherman’s contemptuous and demeaning treatment of Shasta has left the boy struggling with feelings of inferiority. As a result, Shasta is desperately grateful when he realizes that he has no familial obligation to love Arsheesh any longer.

(3.l) Is the character a member of any particular religious or social group? If so, what do you know about this group? What motivates this group? What do its members feel to be important?

Initially, Shasta identifies himself with the Calormene people and heritage he has been imbibing since infancy. He sees himself as a Calormene and thinks and acts accordingly. When Bree contradicts this supposition by identifying Shasta as a “Northerner” like himself, Shasta begins to experience a conversion of sorts. He reinspects every facet of his life, throwing out those elements that smack of Calormene slavery and replacing them with the qualities

and ideals of a free Archenlander or Narnian. As he undergoes this transformation, Shasta joins Bree in dreaming of Narnia and its delights. The two follow their intense yearning for freedom to the very borders of the North and Narnia, the bastion of liberty for all people (and talking animals). This longing for liberty motivates them to escape their captors.

(3.m) What does the character think is the most important thing in life? How do you know this? Does the character say this out loud, or do his thoughts and actions give him away?

Shasta wants, more than anything, to truly belong. Having grown up as a foreigner, orphan, and slave in a strange and hostile land, he longs to fit into a society and to have a family, a country, an identity and freedom.

(3.o) How does the personality of the character reflect the values of the society (or individual) that produced the story?

At first blush, Shasta has all the earmarks of a Calormene slave, merely because of his limited life content. This embarrassing truth is evident in his encounter with Bree:

“My Tarkaan is on his way North to the great city, to Tashbaan itself and the court of the Tisroc

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‘I say,’ put in Shasta, ‘Oughtn’t you to say ‘May he live forever’?

‘Why?’ asked the horse, “I’m a free Narnian. And why should I talk slaves’ and fools’ talk? I don’t want him to live forever, and he’s not going to live forever, whether I want him to or not! And I can see you’re from the free North too. No more of this Southern jargon between you and me!” (p. 13)

As the story progresses, Shasta unlearns many stilted Calormene manners and adopts the manners of a free, Northern boy. While the manners of the Calormenes reflect the servile, tyrannical nature of that society, the manners of the Northerners reflect the open, easy, free, and self-sufficient nature of that civilization. Shasta’s response to the autocratic Calormene society seems to reflect Lewis’s own views of a tyrannical monarchy. An

Englishman to the core, Lewis supported king and country wholeheartedly. Indeed, he even created Narnia, that bastion of liberty and peace, as a monarchy, thereby clearly supporting that form of government. His treatment of Calormene, however, seems to be a subtle commentary on the nature of a monarchy gone sour. Lewis praises the monarchy rooted in a “Christian” religion, but he vilifies dictatorships founded on idolatry.

(3.q) Is the character a type or an archetype? Is he an “Everyman” with whom the reader is meant to identify? Are his struggles symbolic of human life generally in some way?

Shasta is a sympathetic character with common foibles and sins. His efforts to mature and to belong are universal and his often comedic failures cultivate compassion and empathy from his readers. These aspects of his character qualify him as an “Everyman.”

(4) Who else is the story about?(4.a) Is there a single character (or group of characters) that opposes the protagonist in the story? In other words, is there an antagonist?

There are three antagonists in the story:

1. Aravis antagonizes Shasta initially. Scorning his base ignorance and his lowly upbringing, she considers herself far superior to him and intentionally makes him feel the social gap between them. (Man vs. Man)

2. As all four of the characters are runaways, they constantly fear discovery and punishment. Their universal dread of being exposed turns all of Calormen into one great antagonist. (Man vs. Society)

3. After Tashbaan, the four runaways race Prince Rabadash of Calormene to Narnia, attempting to warn the Narnians of impending danger before Rabadash’s attack. This is a Man vs. Man (Runaways vs. Rabadash) or a Man vs. Nature (Runaways vs. Distance/ Time) conflict.

(4.b) In what way is he/she antagonistic? What goal of the protagonist is he/she opposed to?

Aravis opposes Shasta’s goal of learning to be a free man and an equal. Treating him like the slave he was instead of the free man he is destined to become, she ignores him, snubs him, and makes

him look ridiculous. In so doing she hinders his progress to maturity. Very proud of her lineage and her station, Aravis suffers from a self-righteous superiority complex. This attitude is evident in Shasta and Aravis's first meeting.

“Look here,’ said the girl. ‘I don’t mind going with you Mr. War Horse, but what about this boy? How do I know he’s not a spy?’... ‘All right, then. Let’s go together.’ But she didn’t say anything to Shasta and it was obvious that she wanted Bree, not him.” (p. 34)

This same condescension pervades their relationship throughout the tale, creating tension.

In Tashbaan, the runaways fear discovery. Surrounded by nobles and lords, Aravis remains in constant danger of being recognized. Hwin, Bree, and Shasta blend into the crowd until Shasta is recognized as the barbarian Prince Corin's look-alike and separated from his friends. All through this chapter, doom and discovery hover.

Aravis overhears a conversation between the Tisroc and his horrible son, Prince Rabadash, in which the Tisroc consents to let Rabadash pursue the “barbarian princess” (Queen Susan) into Narnia and lay waste to Archenland on the way. Upon learning this, Aravis and Shasta begin a mad dash across the desert to beat Rabadash to Archenland. This scramble is a result of a Man vs. Man or Man vs. Society conflict.

(4) Who else is the story about?

Here are some details about the major characters in this story:

Shasta

Shasta is an adolescent servant to the Calormene fisherman, Arsheesh. Though he serves Arsheesh well and ties his best to be satisfied with his life as a poor, orphan slave, Shasta dreams of Narnia and freedom. Little does he know at the start of the story that he is of Narnian descent, the son of King Lune of Archenland. Shasta is a patient, humble, respectful, insecure young man, but his adventures grow him up into the brave, confident, good-hearted man he was meant to be.

Aravis

A young, Calormene Tarkheena or noblewoman, Aravis starts out the story as an arrogant, self-absorbed, spoiled brat. As events progress on her journey with Shasta, however, Aravis comes up against her own shortcomings and immaturities and regrets her initial catty behavior. By the end of the story, Aravis has grown into many good qualities such as humility, gratitude, thoughtfulness, and self-control.

Bree

Bree is a pompous, Narnian horse who has been a war horse, (that is, a slave to a Calormene Tarkhan) for his whole life. Though a cowardly, self-righteous, arrogant, character, Bree does have many great qualities that endear him to readers. He's clever and patient and visionary and good-hearted. By the end of the story, Bree has also been matured by the events which transpire during the journey and grown into his good qualities as Aravis has.

Hwin

Hwin is the very last of the four travelers. A healthy, Narnian mare, Hwin has lived her whole life in Aravis's stables. Now on a journey to find freedom at last, Hwin proves herself a loyal, humble, meek, sensible, companion and friend. She holds Bree "the great war horse" in awe, but doesn't think much of herself at all.

Aslan

The lord and master of Narnia is the Christ-figure of the story. In this book, he proves himself to be faithful, omniscient, omnipotent and loving. In protecting and caring for Shasta from his infancy up to the moment when he reconnects with his father, King Lune, Aslan proves himself a patient and intentional lord who spends time caring for the needs and desires of each of his individual subjects.

Arsheesh

Arsheesh is the obsequious, greedy, cruel fisherman whom Shasta calls "father" in the initial portion of the story. Though he cares for nothing but material gain and he treats Shasta quite poorly, he plays a crucial role in the story, taking in Shasta as a dying baby and bringing him up healthy and strong.

King Lune

King Lune is Shasta's real father. He is a large, jovial, warm-hearted man who never quite recovered from the disappearance of his son which occurred years before our story begins. King Lune is a very happy, very trusting man, eager to keep the peace in his country, Archenland. He is gentle and forbearing even with his enemies as we see in his relations with Rabadash.

Prince Corin

Prince Corin is Shasta's twin brother. Though he looks almost identical to Shasta in his youth, he grows into a much burlier, brawnier man. He is a well-intentioned young man, but he loves a good fight and often starts one purely for his own enjoyment. He is known in his later years as Corin Thunder-fist as a result of his excellent skill as a boxer.

Edmund, Lucy, Susan, and Peter Pevensie

As this story takes place chronologically during the Pevensies' reign in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the children play a tangential role in the story. They visit the city of the Tisroc because Prince Rabadash has asked for Queen Susan's hand in marriage. She and her entourage have come to visit for the sake of inspecting this suitor and his family and making a decision regarding an alliance of their families. Though we only see these four for a very brief moment in the middle and the end of the tale, they seem to be quite the same honorable, warm-hearted family they have always been.

Rabadash

The eldest son of the Tisroc, Rabadash is a spoiled, cruel, rotten, ambitious young man who is very accustomed to getting exactly what he wants when he wants it. Having set his heart on marrying Queen Susan and annexing her country with his own, he throws a dramatic temper tantrum when she rejects him. His tantrum involves marshaling an army of Calormene warriors and invading her country!

Tisroc

The Tisroc is the true ruler of Calormen. He is very aware of his son, Rabadash's volatile nature and humors his whims where Queen Susan is concerned. He even allows his son to take the army

Questions About Structure: Conflict

(5) What does the protagonist want?

Shasta wants to become a free Narnian or Archenlander. To do this, he must make a journey that tests his strength, courage, and endurance. This trek is difficult for Shasta on many levels. Not only does he face formidable, physical obstacles, but he also faces his own insecurity, immaturity, and weakness. In order to become a true Narnian or Archenlander, he must first root out the foreign values and worldviews that were ingrained in him from his youth. This process is both painful and humbling.

(5.c) Does he strive to overcome a physical obstacle outside of himself (An ocean, for example, like Christopher Columbus, or nature generally, like a Jack London character)?

He must cross a desert, navigate unknown territory with lions pursuing him, and then, at the story's climax, he must forego rest and keep on running to warn the Archenlanders while the others stay back in safety. Each of these obstacles is physical.

Shasta's internal battle with his feelings of inferiority and insignificance are far more spiritual and emotional in nature.

(5.f) Do his objectives or goals change throughout the story?

At the beginning of the story, Shasta's reasons for fleeing are purely selfish. He wants to escape slavery and experience freedom in the North. Through the events in the story, however, he matures and forms relationships with Aravis, Hwin, and Bree and he begins to put their needs before his own. He evidences this heroism when a lion attacks Aravis and Hwin; for though the great war horse, Bree, flees heedless of everything but self-preservation, Shasta leaps from Bree's back to run towards the danger and aid the women. This courageous act of sacrifice proves his worthiness and his maturity; with it he gains Aravis's respect and demonstrates princely virtue.

(6) Why can't the protagonist have what he wants?

Shasta struggles against distances. (Man vs. Nature) and armies. (Man vs. Man/Man vs. Society)

Shasta lacks self-confidence. (Man vs. Self)

Shasta battles his class and his age in Aravis's eyes. (Man vs. Man/Society)

Questions About Structure: Plot

(9) How is the main problem solved? (9.b) How are the protagonist's obstacles finally overcome?

Shasta is sent by the hermit to continue his grueling trek alone and as a direct result of this bravery and self-sacrifice, he warns the Archenlanders of the impending disaster just in time. On the trip to King Lune's Castle however, he gets lost in a thick mist. There in the night, wrapped in the fog, Shasta encounters a huge lion who begins to talk to him. In their ensuing conversation, Shasta learns that this is the very lion who had led him (or rather chased him) across Calormen and Narnia and had protected him by the tombs, who had led him throughout his quest and had attacked his friends in order to speed their flight to warn the Northerners. This lion is none other than the famous Aslan, the Emperor of the Lone Islands, the Champion of Narnia, and the True King of the North. When the fog clears, Shasta finds himself in Narnia instead of Archenland. Not only that, but he discovers that the path he traversed overnight was fraught with dangers, sheer cliffs, drop offs, and every kind of hazard. The lion had protected and led him through these in order to secure safety for both him and all of the North. In Narnia, Shasta warns the Narnians of Rabadash's plans, and they all rush to battle to aid King Lune of Archenland. Thanks to Shasta's timely warning, the Northerners conquer Rabadash.

(10) How does the story end?

Here at the end of the tale, Shasta discovers his true identity. He is the long lost son of King Lune of Archenland himself. With this last confirmation of his fledgling identity as a Northerner, Shasta truly *belongs*. When he goes to retrieve his friends from the hermit's dwelling, he greets Aravis, not as Shasta the fisherman's boy, but as Prince Cor of Archenland, and they laugh together at their silly squabbles of the past. Many years later, they marry, for "they were so used to quarreling and making up again that they got married so as to go on doing it more conveniently." (p.241) Together the two children and their faithful equine friends enter Archenland and freedom.

Questions About Structure: Theme

(11) What does the protagonist learn? (12) What do the other characters learn?

Each character learns a lesson through the events in this story. Shasta learns the importance of friendship as his relationships with Bree, Hwin, and Aravis develop. This lesson is brought home when the lions attack Aravis and Hwin. Shasta realizes in an instant that the safety of his friends ranks even higher in his heart than his own fear of death.

Aravis learns to think of others as better than herself. Through her encounter with Aslan, she realizes the consequences of her selfish actions and learns to repent of being a respecter of persons. Also, Shasta's heroism causes her to realize that she has misjudged him dreadfully.

Bree also learns a lesson in humility. Pompous in his pride and conceit, he thinks himself far above the others...especially Hwin. However, when he is faced with danger, he flees as fast as he can, heedless of Shasta's cries, leaving the women in danger. He proves himself a coward, and the realization plants humility in his heart. Faced with this ugly truth, he becomes a first rate Narnian horse.

(13) What is the main idea of the story?

Friendship, Coming of Age, Pride and Humility, Providence, and the Nature of God are just a few of the themes illustrated by the story.

As the characters face the conflicts and obstacles of their great adventure, they learn to trust and even depend upon one another. As proven by Shasta's heroic gesture in the mad dash from the Lion, the characters learn to put the needs of the others before themselves. They learn to lay down their lives for one another, thereby realizing the nature of love and friendship.

This lesson in love and friendship goes hand in hand with the emotional growth each character experiences. As Shasta and Aravis learn to overcome their differences and love one another despite their rough edges, they "come of age." Their individual experiences with Aslan (Shasta in the foggy night and Aravis with her torn back) also help them to mature into a young man and

woman. For his part, Bree “comes of age” when faced with his own cowardice and failure. In his encounters with Aslan, he is stripped of his pride and forced to learn the nature of true humility.

Throughout the story, hints of providence whisper at the edges of events. A lion haunts the characters, appearing to bring Shasta, Bree, Aravis, and Hwin together; to protect Shasta at the tombs; to chase the characters to the hermitage just in time; and to keep Shasta safe within the fog. Through these perpetual appearances and Aslan’s eventual explanations to Shasta, it becomes evident that the characters are guided providentially. At the end of the tale, the Lion reveals himself, explaining his motives and revealing his true identity as their king and their loving God: Aslan. Through the Lion’s providential pursuing, Lewis discusses the true nature of God, identifying Him as an omniscient and omnipotent lord who cares for his children deeply and individually. This nature is evident in Aslan’s conversation with Shasta that night in the fog. When Shasta asks Aslan if it was not unfortunate luck to have met so many lions along his journey, the lord answers:

“There was only one lion,” said the Voice.

“What on earth do you mean? I’ve just told you there were at least two the first night, and..”

“There was only one: but he was swift of foot.”

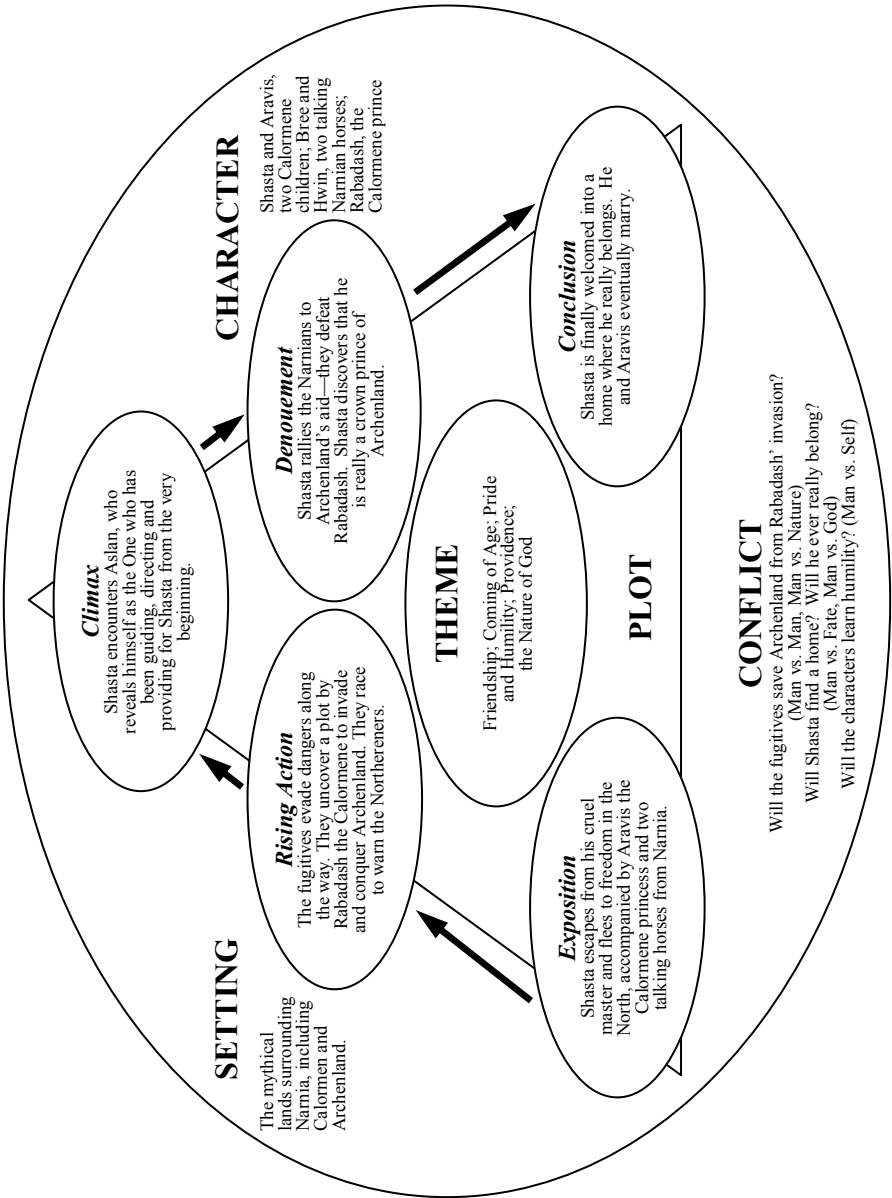
“How do you know?”

“I was the lion.” And as Shasta gaped with open mouth and said nothing, the Voice continued. “I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the Horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you.” (p. 176)

This interview between Aslan and Shasta illustrates Aslan’s Christ-like nature in that it highlights his constant, personal

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Story Chart



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