

The Last Battle

by C. S. Lewis

Overview

Plot

Using an old lion's skin as a disguise, Shift the monkey dupes Narnians into following a false Aslan, forsaking true Narnian ways and welcoming Calormene domination. Aided by Eustace Scrubb and Jill Pole, King Tirian leads a band of true Narnians into battle against the invaders and against their false philosophies and false gods as well.

Conflict

Will Tirian and his friends save Narnia and renew the people's faith in the real Aslan? (Man vs. Society, Man vs. Man)

Setting

The mythical land of Narnia in the last chapter of its history. In this story, the Narnian world comes to a final end.

Characters

King Tirian of Narnia; Eustace Scrubb and Jill Pole; Shift the monkey and Puzzle the donkey; the gods Aslan and Tash; Rishda Tarkaan the Calormene officer; the Pevensie children.

Theme

Faith; Materialism vs. Supernaturalism; Good vs. Evil

Questions About Structure: Setting

(1) Where does the story happen?

This story takes place in the last days of the Narnian world. Foreigners threaten Narnia more insistently than ever before, and unlike the old days, some Narnians aid the foreigners in their attacks, betraying their own countrymen.

(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 atmosphere?

An intense sense of foreboding (uncommon to the Narnian tales) hangs in the air. Centaurs, Narnian sages and seers, predict roaming evil and disaster for Narnia. Lies are rampant, and foreigners encroach on Narnia's borders. Lewis reveals all this conflict in the second chapter as the centaur, Roonwit, reports to King Tirian:

“Never in all my days have I seen such terrible things written in the skies as there have been nightly since this year began. The stars say nothing of the coming of Aslan, nor of peace, nor of joy. I know by my art that there have not been such disastrous conjunctions of the planets for five hundred years. It was already in my mind to come and warn your Majesty that some great evil hangs over Narnia. But last night the rumor reached me that Aslan is abroad in Narnia. Sire, do not believe this tale. It cannot be. The stars never lie, but Men and Beasts do. If Aslan were really coming to Narnia the sky would have foretold it. If he were really come, all the most gracious stars would be assembled in his honor. It is all a lie.” (p. 19)

Such heavy predictions and portentous omens bode ill for the future of Narnia and its occupants. They are fulfilled all too soon. Not two minutes after the direful conversation with Roonwit, a mourning tree beseeches the King for help, wailing that the Calormenes are felling the talking trees in Lantern Waste. Disaster strikes.

(2) When does the story happen? (2.b) How long a period of time does the story cover? A few minutes? A single day? A whole lifetime?

The story outlines the death of Narnia over the course of about a week.

(2.e) In what time of life for the main characters do the events occur? Are they children? Are they just passing into adulthood? Are they already grownups? Does setting the story in this particular time of the characters' lives make the story better?

The three protagonists are King Tirian, Jill Pole, and Eustace Scrubb.

Tirian is between 20 and 25 years of age. Though truly a good-hearted ruler, he is fairly young and hotheaded. His impetuous, rash actions create conflict in the story, but also lend him strength to fight for his doomed nation.

Jill and Eustace are more than a year older than they were in *The Silver Chair*. They are still young enough to be sent into Narnia to help Tirian. Their age allows them to adapt easily to the changes in Narnia and to accept their difficult task.

(2.f) In what intellectual period is the story set? What ideas were prevalent during the period of the story? Does the author deal with these ideas through his characters? Do the characters respond to social rules and customs that are the result of these ideas? (Jane Austen's books, for example, were set in the early 19th century in England, when women were bound by social laws forbidding them from owning or inheriting property. Consequently, marriage to men of property was their only source of financial security. Without this knowledge, the dialogue in *Pride and Prejudice*, and the action in *Emma*, are unintelligible to the modern reader.)

Lewis penned his chronicles in the mid twentieth century, an age of atheism and scientific naturalism. The popular worldview of the intellectual elite had departed from traditional concepts of Christianity, objective truth, and a created order and moved towards modernist views of subjectivity, naturalism, and evolution. A master apologist for Christianity, however, Lewis made it his mission to defend traditional values. As materialists attempted to

assert their theory that the world is only material and not supernatural in the slightest, Lewis debunked their argument, questioning their ability even to believe their own hypothesis given the nature of their claim. His apology against materialism went something like this:

If all thought or belief is merely a result of irrational, atomic collisions in the brain, then man has no earthly reason to suppose that thoughts or beliefs are truthful or rational. After all, random atoms colliding are neither “true” nor “false”, so neither can the thoughts resulting from these collisions be considered truthful or untruthful. Truth is therefore entirely subjective, defined in each case by each person based on his or her individual preferences.

Lewis argued that this theory of materialism is self-refuting. Man has no reason to believe in this theory, because if it is true then even man’s belief in this theory is an irrational result of random atomic collisions and is therefore untrustworthy.

Lewis himself believed in an objective truth predetermined by a supernatural God. He believed that before he could evangelize his materialistic contemporaries he first had to “remythologize” them. The ancients, even with their worship of gods and goddesses and personification of nature, were perhaps closer to Christian conversion than the present day materialist. They at least believed in the supernatural. In his Narnia chronicles, Lewis attempted to illustrate this kinship between mythology and Christianity with his depiction of fauns and satyrs, naiads and dryads, river gods and goddesses.

This intellectual battle between Christianity and scientific naturalism or materialism has great bearing on the events in *The Last Battle*. While Shift and Rishda Tarkaan have discarded popular belief in deities such as Aslan and Tash, Tirian and his Narnian comrades cling to their faith in Aslan. Shift’s faithlessness allows him to twist the truth without a twinge of guilt. He manipulates Puzzle into impersonating Aslan, assuring both himself and the donkey that because he doesn’t believe that Aslan exists it isn’t “wrong” to impersonate him and “make a bit of a profit.” If truth were merely subjective as Shift argues then he would be perfectly within his rights to violate Aslan’s unspoken laws. He himself chooses not to believe in Aslan and therefore Aslan doesn’t exist. Events in the story illustrate Lewis’s views on this point, however, as first Tash and then Aslan appear in flesh and blood at

Questions About Structure: Characters

(3) Who is the story about?

Tirian is the last King of Narnia. Young and eager, he is often over-zealous in fulfilling his duties, but he possesses a good, warm, kingly heart. His bravery and loyalty to Aslan and his country make him a highly sympathetic character.

Jill and Eustace arrive to help Tirian and experience their last adventure in Narnia. They are much the same as they were in *The Silver Chair*: eager, impulsive, impetuous, sweet, earnest, and loyal to the core. Their bravery and intuition keep Tirian from losing himself in despair for the plight of Narnia.

(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 this story. Shift, an evil old monkey, conspires with Rishda Tarkaan, the Calormene leader, and Ginger the turncoat cat. Together, these three devise a plot to snatch political power from the Narnian people. Dressing Puzzle in an old lion's skin, they deceive all the Narnians into thinking that a disappointed and angry Aslan has returned, in this way manipulating the populace to their own ends. They are wicked, faithless, greedy characters, vicious to the core.

Shift, the scheming ringleader, looks the part. Old, unconscionably wrinkled, ugly, and malicious, he uses his small, wizened appearance to manipulate simple beasts like Puzzle.

“Really, Puzzle,” said Shift, “I didn’t think you’d ever say a thing like that. I didn’t think it of you, really.”

“Why, what have I said wrong?” said the Ass, speaking in rather a humble voice, for he saw that Shift was very deeply offended. “All I meant was – ”

“Wanting me to go into the water,” said the Ape. “As if you didn’t know perfectly well what weak chests Apes always have and how easily they catch cold! Very well. I will go in. I’m feeling

cold enough already in this cruel wind. But I'll go in. I shall probably die. Then you'll be sorry.' And Shift's voice sounded as if he was just going to burst into tears." (p. 4-5)

Taking advantage of Puzzle's kindness and simple intellect, Shift manipulates the donkey into serving him like a slave. He uses similar manipulation tactics to control the majority of the Narnian population later on in the story.

By characterizing this wicked antagonist as a *monkey*, Lewis brings interesting themes to bear on his dying world. A monkey masquerading as a man (bedecked in paper crown and ill-fitting shoes), Shift spreads faithlessness and dissent among the loyal Narnians. With this character, Lewis alludes to the modern day struggle between science-based materialism and Christianity. After the first World War, disillusioned people around the globe rejected traditional beliefs in a sovereign creator in favor of a new theory of origin: Evolution. This theory proposed that man wasn't created, but rather evolved from a lowly ape to a human being. Such a theory stripped man of his honorable status as the one creature "made in the image of God" and identified him instead as the descendant of an ape. In addition, this explanation for the origin of the universe bred faithlessness and dissent as it eliminated the need for a creator. Contemporary proponents of this theory departed from traditional Christianity and theism in favor of naturalism and materialism. In depicting his antagonist as a monkey, Lewis gives a nod to this evolutionist conflict, emphasizing the destruction the theory leaves in its wake.

Rishda Tarkaan is a greedy, cunning, ambitious Calormene Captain. Though he spouts the Calormene religion, professing unswerving devotion to their god Tash, he is really a faithless and unbelieving worm of a man. When Shift takes to drinking and loses his hold on the crowd, Rishda seizes control of the plot to overthrow Narnia. Backed by his Calormene army, Rishda continues the conspirators' initial ruse to keep the Narnians in obedience to their cause and bides his time to strike the Narnians at their weakest moment.

Ginger, in true cat fashion, sits prim and perfect just out of the circle of firelight – spreading fear, dissent, and disbelief through the Narnian crowd. He is clever, cunning, cruel, and contemptible. He

takes over much of the planning and thinking when Shift binges, but he leaves the fighting to Rishda.

(4.m) Is the antagonist truly evil, by definition, or is he merely antagonistic to the protagonist by virtue of his vocation or duty?

Shift is truly evil. He sees every new circumstance as a chance to further his own selfish goals, heedless of the cost to others.

Rishda Tarkaan is greedy, cruel and selfish – a truly unrepentant villain. In addition, his use of superstition to enslave a nation through fear is rightly rewarded when he finds out that the god he has used and supposed imaginary to be a very real and fearsome demon.

Ginger is a hypocrite and a pharisee, playing the part of a deceived Narnian while being in truth the deceiver. He is a foul, cruel character, antagonistic to the core.

(4.j) Is he strangely attractive? Does he draw others into his wicked sensibilities (as, for example, Wormwood in *The Screwtape Letters*)? Does he seem somehow rational, justified, even righteous in his actions (as Javert in *Les Miserables*)?

Shift and Ginger are not attractive physically, but their silky, well-reasoned arguments draw other power-hungry people into their wicked sensibilities. They are intellectually magnetic.

Rishda Tarkaan is not attractive in any way. He leaves deceit and attraction to Ginger and Shift, while he favors manipulation and brute force.

(4) Who else is the story about?

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

Tirian

Tirian is the King of Narnia at the start of this last chapter in the nation's history. Young and zealous, Tirian is a warm-hearted, compassionate, brave leader whose faith in Aslan is unwavering. His strong character and firm faith make him the perfect choice as the very last King of Narnia.

Jewel

Jewel is a unicorn. He is King Tirian's trusty steed and faithful friend. When all of Narnia deserts Tirian, Jewel remains steadfast,

suffering punishment at the hands of Rishda's men for the sake of his loyalty to Tirian. He is a courageous, formidable warrior.

Eustace

Eustace has grown so much since his last adventure to Narnia in *The Silver Chair* that readers will hardly recognize him. He is a calm, level-headed, loyal, brave young man, true to Narnia and to Aslan. Readers recognize the stubborn resilience and pride which were so much a part of Eustace in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, but these traces of the old Eustace are certainly fading away. He has become the boy he was meant to be at last.

Jill

Jill also has grown significantly since her last escapade in Narnia. She is an inquisitive, sweet, spunky, courageous young lady, eager to save Narnia from her oppressors. Jill's woodsman skills aid Tirian and Eustace on their journey to Stable Hill and her ingenuity in freeing Puzzle helps the heroes build a case against the evil monkey and his Calormene goons. She plays an integral role in the last Narnian adventure.

Shift

Shift is the antagonist of the story. A mangy, wicked old monkey, Shift uses his keen wits to the detriment of others in an attempt to amass material gain and political prominence for himself. He is the evil mastermind behind the crude ruse which brings down Narnia at last. Though he starts off the story as a formidable force, he turns to drink before the story ends and by the climax, he is a useless, helpless drunkard and a threat to no one.

Puzzle

Puzzle is a simple-minded, soft-hearted donkey who stands in foolish awe of Shift. Though he doesn't intend any harm, he participates in Shift's ruse and aids in the destruction of Narnia. He wears the lion skin Shift finds and impersonates Aslan himself. His ignorance earns him pardon when Aslan finally appears, for Shift truly took advantage of his trusting nature.

Rishda

Rishda Tarkaan is a Calormene officer intent on the conquest of Narnia. He bands together with clever Ginger the turncoat cat and Shift the conniving monkey to plot Narnia's destruction. Aside

from his lust for conquest, Rishda's unbelief is his major characteristic. Rishda professes belief in Tash, the Calormene deity, but he is truly a materialist and a naturalist at heart.

Ginger

Ginger is a Narnian cat who plays the traitor to his country in her last hour and sides with the scheming monkey and the Calormene officer to bring down Narnia. He fuels doubt and sows dissent and discord in the ranks of the Narnians.

Aslan

Aslan is the Christ figure of the story, as usual. In this particular chronicle, he plays a less active role in the plot. He guards the door to the next world when Narnia falls at last, judging between the known and the unknown, the clean and the unclean. He welcomes the tired travelers home at last to their eternal rest in his country.

Tash

Tash is the Calormene deity who Rishda Tarkaan and his men profess to worship. While the Narnians believe whole-heartedly in Aslan, they doubt that Tash is anything more than a myth. They are quite shocked to discover that Tash is just as real as Aslan. He is a fearsome demon, ready to claim the souls of all who worship him and sweep them off to live with him in hell.

The Pevensies

The Pevensie children return in this last episode of the chronicles. They appear in the very last scene only to discover that they have died in a train accident, and they are here in Narnia at last to stay forever. For some mysterious (and much debated) reason, Lewis omits Susan from this final resolution. However, the other three Pevensies and Eustace and Jill find that Narnia is their eternal home and Aslan is their lord and master. They are inexpressibly happy and grateful to spend eternity with him.

NOTES:

Questions About Structure: Conflict

(5) What does the protagonist want?

This story is about Tirian, Jill, and Eustace trying their best to save Narnia and renew the common man's flagging faith in Aslan.

(5.b) Does he attempt to overcome something – a physical impediment, or an emotional handicap? (5.d) Does the protagonist strive to capture an object?

The protagonists try to overcome many social obstacles, for the Narnians themselves are blind to Shift's deception and naively loyal to his orders. As a result, Narnia has turned against King Tirian and his friends. The whole nation stands between the trio and the truth about Shift and his companions.

To convince the Narnians of the truth, the trio must reveal the false Aslan and convince the Narnians to help overthrow Shift and the Calormene regime. They fight for justice, truth, and freedom.

(6) Why can't they have it? (6.a) Do physical or geographical impediments stand in the character's way?

The three lack proof of Shift's treachery for the first section of the rising action. Then they find Puzzle. For a moment, his testimony seems to solve the problem. Yet they are still thwarted, for they lack a faithful army to help them fight for the truth. They are outnumbered. This is a Man vs. Man or a Man vs. Society struggle.

Shift, Ginger, and Rishda Tarkaan try to keep the truth a secret, weaving an ever more tangled web of deceit. Believing themselves that there are no such persons as Aslan or Tash, they feel no qualms in erasing all distinction between the two, muddying the waters of the Narnians' faith. In their heedless heresy, they "call upon" Tash to come to them, convinced that it is all a superstitious ruse. Their slimy efforts directly oppose those of the trio spreading truth. This can be understood as a Man vs. Man conflict, in which Tirian and the children resist Rishda and Shift's attempts to deceive and enslave Narnia. Additionally, a Man vs. God conflict exists as the Narnians directly deny the existence of their Creator. Heeding Shift's words, they agree that Aslan must be a figment of their own imaginations. Regardless of the testament of

Questions About Structure: Plot

(8) What happens in the story?

The group of steadfast Narnians, including Tirian, Eustace, Jill and Jewel, see a wraithlike horror floating from the woods, heading North into the heart of Narnia. Aghast, they realize that it is Tash himself. Poggin the dwarf, the last of the loyal Narnian dwarves, scoffs shakily, “This fool of an Ape, who didn’t believe in Tash, will get more than he bargained for! He called for Tash: Tash has come.” (p. 103) This confirmation of the existence of the fabled deities both frightens and buoys up the faith of the group.

As the adventurers struggle on their way to meet the relief warriors from Cair Paravel, Farsight the Eagle stops them. He brings dreadful tidings of Calormene invasion, the slaughter of the loyal defenders at Cair Paravel, and the ultimate defeat of Narnia. Shocked by this horrifying news and the realization of the fullness of the Ape’s treachery, the band finds new strength in anger. Buoyed up by grief and fury, they head straight for the Ape’s camp, eager to die for their sweet Narnia.

When they reach the hill, they listen as the Ape addresses the Narnians, tongue-lashing them for their failure to please “Tashlan.” He urges them to enter the shed to meet the angry, hungry lord they have displeased. “Probably two Calormene soldiers armed with swords on either side of the door,” Tirian comments grimly. It is no surprise when Ginger enters the shed to “prove the safety of the venture”, as he is obviously a conspirator. Yet his exit surprises all! He shoots from the door like a bullet from a gun and clings quivering to the boughs of a tree, stripped of his ability to speak! The tide begins to turn against the conspirators as they realize that the gods they curse and mock may actually exist.

Events continue to conspire against the conspirators as a swarthy, worthy Calormene warrior insists on entering the stable and meeting Tash face to face. As the Calormenes begin to force the Narnians toward the stable, Tirian leaps forth, ready to fight to the death for his people. He shouts a clarion call for one last stand against the enemies of Narnia.

“Here stand I, Tirian of Narnia, in Aslan’s name, to prove with my body that Tash is a foul fiend, the Ape a manifold traitor, and these Calormenes worthy of death. To my side, all true Narnians.

Would you wait till your new masters have killed you all one by one?" (p. 142)

At Tirian's cry, the last battle of Narnia ensues. Though gravely outnumbered by the Calormene rabble, the Narnians make their last stand valiantly. All too soon however, Tirian finds himself at the very doorway to the stable. Shouting bravely, "Come meet Tash yourself then!" he grabs the hauberk of his attacker, Rishda Tarkaan, and dives into the stable.

Suddenly, he finds himself standing in a grassy field in the sunlight, face to face with a line of Kings and Queens. Jill and Eustace are there, and Queen Lucy, King Edmund, and the High King Peter. Tirian discovers that he is clean and well-dressed. All signs of the battle have vanished. Introductions made, the royal company begins to take in their surroundings. The door to the stable stands free in the center of the field. Beside it sit the treacherous dwarves who fired on their own Narnian kin back in the desperate battle. They are convinced that they are sitting in the dank, musty, stable. No amount of persuading or coaxing can change their minds to the contrary. In the midst of the Lucy's pleadings, Aslan appears. He looks Tirian in the eye. "Well done, last of the Kings of Narnia who stood firm at the darkest hour." (p. 183)

(9) How is the main problem solved?

With his last shout and the dive into the darkness of the shed, Tirian reaches the climactic moment of his story. The tension cannot be heightened any longer. The resolution, for good or ill, is only sentences away. The true resolution, however, comes with Aslan's words to Tirian and the ensuing events.

At Lucy's urging, Aslan approaches the dwarfs to awaken them to the reality of their state. No matter what feast Aslan lays before them to eat, nor how loudly he roars in their ears, the dwarves are oblivious.

"You see," said Aslan, "they will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out. But come, children. I have other work to do." (p. 186)

The stubborn, cunning dwarves in some ways mirror the modernists and realists of today. As Aslan speaks of the plight of the dwarves, readers hear Lewis's response to modern unbelievers.

With this, Aslan steps to the door and commands the final night of a fallen Narnia. With the aid of his twisted animal messengers, Aslan fetches all the creatures of the world of Narnia to himself. As they file past him they are sorted into those who love him and those who hate him. Those who hate him file past the door without entering, but those who love him stream in and the joy of the place is tangible. A great, unanimous cry of "Further up and further in!" echoes from the throats of all Narnians, and they begin to run as fast as they can up the hills which stand behind the Kings and Queens and Aslan himself. As they rush off in headlong joy, Aslan addresses Peter. "Peter, High King of Narnia," said Aslan, "shut the Door." (p. 197) When the children turn from the locked door at last, they see the laughter bubbling in Aslan's eyes. "Come further in! Come further up!" he shouts, and off they run, aware of nothing and everything in their ecstasy. As they run, they meet their old dear friends from all of their adventures in Narnia. And still they run onwards and upwards.

(10) How does the story end?

At last, the company reaches the highest mountaintop. On its peak, they discover the garden where Polly and Digory last saw the witch Jadis in *The Magician's Nephew*. To their lasting surprise, they discover that there is a whole Narnia within its walls. Each circle further up and in is bigger and better and more real than the circle before. In fact, as they explore they realize that the Narnia they knew was only a shadow of this real Narnia which now lays spread before them.

Lucy and Edmund and Peter realize suddenly that they can see England in the distance and their own dear parents waving to them from across the way. Yet they are still not altogether happy. Aslan addresses their unease.

"You do not yet look so happy as I mean you to be."

Lucy said, "We're so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often."

“No fear of that,” said Aslan. “Have you not guessed?”

Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them.

“There was a railway accident,” said Aslan softly. “Your mother and father and all of you are – as you used to call it in the Shadowlands – dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.”
(p. 228)

With this triumphant affirmation of all readers’ hopes and dreams, Lewis leaves us to our joy, all strings tied neatly, satisfaction in our hearts.

This conclusion contains Lewis’s final shot at materialism. As the characters journey further and further into the supernatural, heavenly version of Narnia (Aslan’s Country), they realize that it is far more real and true than the material realm of Narnia which now seems more like a shadow or a dream than a reality. Not only does Lewis defend the coexistence of the natural and the supernatural in his story, but here in the conclusion he emphasizes the supernatural as by far the superior sphere of existence.

NOTES:

Questions About Structure: Theme

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

Faith is a central theme in the story. While Tirian does attempt to reclaim his nation politically, his primary struggle is spiritual in nature. As the last king of Narnia, Tirian fights to remember the former glory of his nation and the goodness of his lion lord. He opposes Shift's doubt and treason with every fiber of his being. Conversely, Shift and Rishda Tarkaan scorn the thought of supernatural beings. Faithless to the core, they "summon" the Calormene god Tash in an attempt to cow the people. This clash between Tirian's faith and Shift's faithlessness represents the driving theme of the story.

Lewis drives this theme home in the climax. At the peak of the battle on Stable Hill, Tirian grabs his adversary, Rishda Tarkaan, and dives into the stable. He wakes a moment later in a tranquil field, side by side with his rival. Rishda stands speechless, facing the reality of a god he summoned flippantly.

"A terrible figure was coming toward them. It was far smaller than the shape they had seen from the Tower, though still much bigger than a man, and it was the same. It had a vulture's head and four arms. Its beak was open and its eyes blazed. A croaking voice came from its beak.

"Thou hast called me into Narnia, Rishda Tarkaan. Here I am. What hast thou to say?" (p. 164-165)

Face to face with the god he had considered a mere superstition, Rishda Tarkaan starts back in fear. The faithlessness he strutted in Narnia signs his death-warrant. His lord carts him off to everlasting hell. In this instance, Lewis betrays still more interest in the connection between mythology and Christianity. With his character, Tash, Lewis suggests that the mythical gods are not fictional but demonic. Just as Christianity supports the existence of more than one supernatural power, God and Satan, good and evil, so Lewis supports the reality of multiple mythical figures, Aslan and Tash. The two forces coexist, but in a test of strength (as

readers witnessed in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*) good triumphs every time.

Tirian meets his own liege soon enough.

“A brightness flashed behind them. All turned. Tirian turned last because he was afraid. There stood his heart’s desire, huge and real, the golden Lion, Aslan himself, and already the others were kneeling in a circle round his forepaws and burying their hands and faces in his mane as he stooped his great head to touch them with his tongue. Then he fixed his eyes upon Tirian, and Tirian came near, trembling, and flung himself at the Lion’s feet, and the Lion kissed him and said, ‘Well done, last of the Kings of Narnia who stood firm at the darkest hour.’” (p. 183)

Unlike Rishda Tarkaan, Tirian desperately wants his god, Aslan, to be more than a superstitious story. He yearns to meet his liege-lord face to face and to know that his faith hasn’t been in vain. Aslan does not disappoint; for he is warm, welcoming and overwhelmingly real.

Both Tirian and Rishda Tarkaan swore allegiance to gods they had never seen. While Tirian hoped and believed in the existence of his liege, Rishda assumed that his lord was merely superstition, mocking him accordingly and using a false religion to gain political power for himself and enslave a people through fear. Yet face to face with the supernatural, each man received exactly that for which he asked.

This story also serves as a commentary on the scientific naturalism of Lewis’s day. As Shift attempts to convince the Narnian world that truth is subjective (and so Aslan doesn’t exist because Shift says so), Lewis attempts to prove just the opposite to his audience. Through his use of dramatic irony in the unveiling of Tash and Aslan at the opportune moments in the plot, Lewis emphasizes the ridiculous nature of the monkey’s theory and, in so doing, he highlights the weak points of the theory of scientific naturalism. He drives his point home at last in the conclusion when he not only argues for the existence of the supernatural, but goes so far as to honor the supernatural realm as the ultimate reality.

Questions About Style: Literary Devices

(17) Does the author use the characters and events in his story to communicate a theme that goes beyond them in some way?

Lewis uses the characters of Shift and Rishda Tarkaan to communicate an underlying irony throughout the story. Though they themselves don't believe in Tash or Aslan, the conspirators "summon" Tash in the presence of a host of witnesses. Ironically, both Aslan and Tash do, in fact, exist. In answer to the summons, Tash appears in Narnia. Tirian and his fellows see the specter floating fast to Stable Hill. The dwarf in the king's company chuckles to himself:

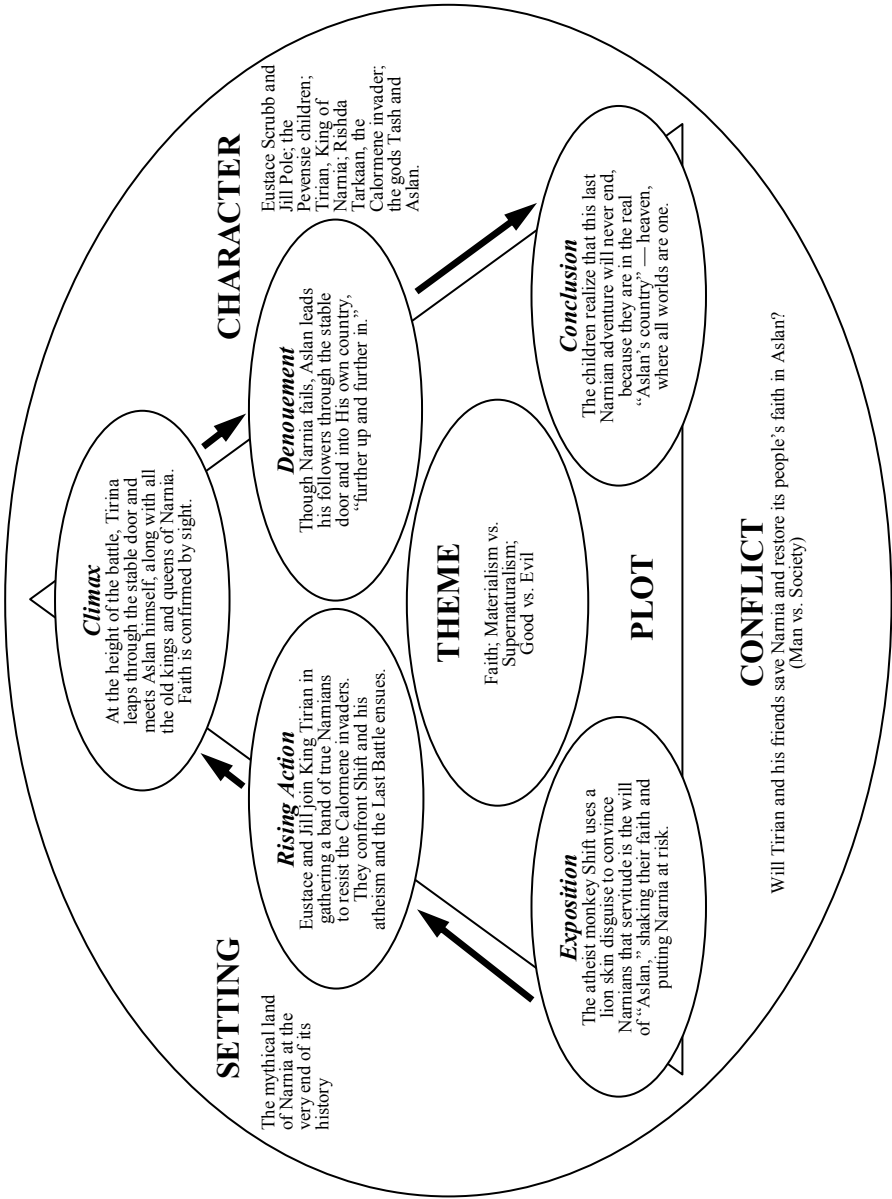
“this fool of an Ape, who didn't believe in Tash, will get more than he bargained for! He called for Tash: Tash has come...”

“Ho, ho , ho!” chuckled the Dwarf, rubbing his hairy hands together. “It will be a surprise for the Ape. People shouldn't call for demons unless they really mean what they say.” (p. 103-104)

This ironic thread is woven throughout the story, increasing the tension and adding an element of humor to the portentous events of the tale.

NOTES:

The Last Battle by C.S. Lewis Story Chart



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