

A Review of the Chronicles of Narnia

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The Standard Review

Wow, what can I say? I have written a few reviews, but I don't know how I am going to be adequately reviewing this series. The Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis has now reached into the second ranking for my all-time favorite fantasy books. It may well make that rank for all book genres yet; I have not decided yet. I shall try to write a review on this though.

For starters, you should all know what my number one favorite all-time author for the fantasy genre, and in fact, the whole of fiction, and most of non-fiction is. This author has long been my standard by which most other books are judged, and his name is J.R.R. Tolkien. Sure, I imagine many people have him as an author, but there are a lot of good things about what he wrote, how he wrote it, and why he wrote it that make his books stand out among the rest.

Lewis was a contemporary of Tolkien, and in fact, they belonged to the same writer's club. They exchanged many ideas back and forth, and from what I can read, they greatly respected each other's works. As such, it is no surprise that Lewis has become such a great writer in my book. What is a sunrise however, is how different he is when compared to the normal styles which I like. Lewis has a distinctly different style of writing in his Narnia series. What is interesting is that I really don't enjoy this particular form of writing in general.

Lewis writes his children's fiction in a manner which is simple. I mean this in many good ways, and no bad ways. His approach is straightforward, and it has a sort of child-like transparency to it. It's an honest style, which bears a great deal of truth out in the forefront, making the many layers of his books readily accessible to people of all ages. Normally, I do not find this very attractive in a book. Lewis, however, is able to combine such a depth of meaning, story, and general character and flavor to this form of writing, that I thoroughly enjoyed it. This is, in fact, probably the only reason he is not number one. Both he and Tolkien wrote very expansive and what I would call, honest, books. They are not filled with philosophical relativism. Rather, the philosophy of their books is unashamedly steadfast. Underlying both Tolkien's and Lewis' books is a deep vein of truth and timeless wisdom. The difference is in how both of these are presented to the reader. It is this difference which puts Tolkien at the head of my list with his abstract, detailed, expansive, and complete portrayal of a world, while Lewis' concrete, upfront, and unfeigned approach, though perhaps presenting the points in a method more understandable, less obscure, and greatly more accessible than Tolkien's, puts him behind; at least, puts him behind to me.

The great attractiveness of this series is its profound innocence. Within the books are some of the greatest, most mature concepts one could ever hope to deal with, and yet, they are presented in a manner so clean, so innocent, and so pure, that it puts the modern fantasy books to shame. The only gripe I have about his books is that the worlds he creates are much less about the completeness of the picture, as much as the vibrance of the specific focal points. As an analogy, Tolkien paints a photorealistic landscape with every person intimately portrayed in vast detail, with the meaning of the painting buried deeply and intricately throughout each leaf and blade of grass, whereas Lewis takes a more impressionistic approach, and let's the main points come out, while leaving the other details to the reader's imagination.

The books characters are also timeless. Every form of person, place, and thing is presented in the Narnian world, and each person will have no difficulty attaching themselves to one person or another.

There is little to no stereotyping of anything here, and there is never a cardboard cutout for a character sketch. Instead, you will find that each person has his place, and when Lewis mentions someone, it is usually for a reason.

All in all, it's impossible, I think, being a good, normally heart oriented person, not to like Lewis' Masterpiece.

A More Personal Narrative

collapses head long to the floor and begins weeping

Mine eyes are as soot, and my tongue rotten with anguish! My heart faileth me, and my breath departeth from me. My mind is gone, it hath run into the blackest pits of despair. My fingers tremble, and I dare not stop the tears.

Oh to be snared and dropped unto utter darkness by so great a genius. So long have I waited, and mine hope was lit and strung out before me as far as the eye could see. Content was within my grasp, and the ground was soft unto my touch. But lo, and behold, fire leapt up, and hath consumed the grass, and the flowers are turned to soot and ash. My despair and woe is upon me, and though I seek deliverance, none shall attend me. I am lost within the sorrows of my grief.

Howbeit that so good a soul, so careful a picture as painted, is thus so wretchedly torn from beneath my feet, and burned within my very home; how can he hath so devised a scheme, so terrible, as to rain destruction upon all I had dreamed? Nay, cast me aside, for I am good no longer. My life is done, and I am wasted away.

A golden wasteland is before me, and I am through it, and I am distraught. I am done, and finished, my work is complete, I am at my end, and sorrow is there to greet me. Wherefore have I come, seeking my refuge at the end, and have found none. I am lost, without hope, and given in. My comforts and my guides have betrayed me, and given me unto mine enemies.

When I didst begin, hope was yet in my grasp, and I laid out the scrolls and opened the tomes of such masterworks as did befit me. And then, I did read my hope, and see it come to life. Surely it would end well. And I continued, and behold, there upon such pages were gleaming of life and beauty, and I didst lay eyes upon genius and marveled at its complexity. Surely as the next book opened did my eyes fall upon my love. My heart was set, and surely did a feast upon the good deeds and the greatness therein. Surely I had great hopes, and my heart stood upon every line. I grew nearer and nearer to the fulfillment of my hopes and dreams! Did cast aside all those who were nothing, and surely didst I make my way straight as an arrow.

But alas, woe, woe, woe! I am fallen, pierced and bled dry. The dogs have feasted upon me, and I am given to death. My tongue is wrung out, and I can speak no more, but in my breath shall I utter these last words, and they shall be written upon stones, and laid upon my coffin, and written in the burning sand which now licks away my skin, oh, the horror, for as I neared what should have been my glorious ending, as the tomes were nearly completed, my heart did fail me, and my eye burned in anguish, and then I didst remember the counting of the pages, seven hundred, two-score, and one:

"My sister Susan," answered Peter shortly and gravely; "is no longer a friend of Narnia."

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Well, apparently no one understood what I meant when I went on and on about my horrid decent into the blackest pits of despair. I guess this is about the time that I should sit down to explain what I meant by that. Most of you seemed to think that I had finished the Chronicles of Narnia that I have been reading. That's true, I have finished them, first to last, and faster than I wanted to. I dashed

through them with fervor because I wanted to read more and more, but then I was done, and I was done too far ahead of schedule, which means that I have to find some more books. But that's not the reason I wrote that entry.

You see, you all forgot something very important. That quote really hits home what this is all about. All that I was writing there was brought to a culmination in that quote, but everyone seems to have overlooked it.

I suppose that most people won't understand where I am coming from here, so let's start at the beginning, with a little bit of history.

I have an active imagination, at least, when it comes to books. I also can greatly, powerfully, and very strongly sympathize, empathize, and connect myself with fantasy characters. You should take note of my post about me and fantasy. In general, I tend to pick one or two characters, and their interactions to whom I attach myself.

So...when it comes to the Chronicles of Narnia, the first book I read was the Magician's Nephew, which is, from what I read, the true "first" book of the Series. I read it, it was nice and good, but I didn't really become attached to any of the characters. Usually I would have someone picked out by then, but I did not have one yet. Then, along comes the second book, "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe." Yes, this is where the world is set up for a great fall. And when I say that I mean my world. Lo, and behold, who do we have here? Four nice children. I could feel a bit for poor Edmund's situation, but nothing great, he wasn't my favorite. Lucy was a positively wonderful character, so full of life and joy; those of you who know me will understand that this is NOT the kind of character that I like, she's too good, too happy, and just plain too full of life, drives me nuts. So there are really a few other choices left. Naturally, the one who I can relate with the most is Peter, as the eldest, and many of his plights almost feel like mine. But then again, I may just be saying that to make myself feel more like a great High King. Yet, still, he did everything that I would have expected, and was good, but something was missing.

Enter Susan. Yes, that's right, that darling girl. First let's point out her title at the end of the book, if I recall correctly, "Queen Susan the Gentle." *romantic sigh* Yes, that's just my kind of gal. I believe there is also an entry talking about her hair? Now, surely you all know well enough how much THAT does for me. Give me long flowing dark hair and I'm a goner. So from then on, it's obvious who my personal favorite is in the story. Honestly, I enjoyed her dialog, and her position, her demeanor and her manner.

But at last that book must end. It ended interestingly enough, but it ended unfinished. It was a chapter in a saga, nothing more. You see, the problem is that the book itself didn't get to me in the way that a book can. I really liked the book, and it was well done, but the action that I wanted wasn't there. You see, I just knew, somehow that what I really wanted to see what all these majestic little kids come back to Narnia as the "Ancient and almost forgotten kings" that legends speak of, and to come back and show them who's boss. I don't know why, but it's just something like that, the appearance of the lost, come back to save the future generations, steadfast, noble, and powerful. I knew it had to happen sometime, so that's when I began to become really voracious in my reading habits. I was waiting for when they would all return in their kingly majesty.

So in the next book, the wonderful, exciting, and very satisfying story of "The Horse and His Boy," I found myself quite entertained and impressed with the general direction of things; for of course, here was Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy at their finest hour working and dealing with a great deal of wonder in the Narnian world as their noble stature should have them. Of course, I could have been reading into things just a bit, but I rather enjoyed Susan's part in the whole thing. The issues of marriage, the deceit of the prince which she had at first begun to at least consider. To top it all off we had her off to face giants in the north. What fun! Yet, still, this put them in their own time, and not in a come back

kind of power, and though Susan's part was nice, I didn't see anything of Peter that I found particularly marvelous, so the book wasn't the end of my fascinations; it whetted my appetite for more.

Now we come to possibly my favorite of the books; I am still not sure which will eventually hold my place as absolute favorite, but this one is up there. "Prince Caspian," now there is a story. Here we have the four Pevensy children being thrown back into time by a wonderful horn. At this point things just keep getting better and better for me. For what better thing to have happen than for it to have been Susan's horn that called them back. That's a wonderful thing indeed, nostalgic, powerful, and just plain cool. It fit my idea of how things should go very well. Everything is going as planned in this book. Here we see all the children return as the famed Kings of old. The Great Kings. Peter is shown in his full glory as High King, and a great fighter and a responsible leader. During their chase to meet Caspian, when Peter goes the wrong way, he leads with determination, and when he realizes that they have been going the wrong way all along, he humbly admits it, and shows real maturity in dealing with his mistakes. It's wonderful, too, because I get to see Susan at a point where you can begin to worry about her. Here we see her fall for her selfish aims, and just wanting to be out of the pain. This perhaps, was a hint of what was to come, but I was pleasantly given relief as she positively admits her failure to Susan, and really does mend. I am liking Susan more and more along this time, because she's seems to have the proper maturity and responsibilities in her, and a kind of sweet genteel lady-like goodness that is hard to surpass. Of course, I am quite fond of both Edmund and Lucy in this book as well. I think really this is the book where the four children get a chance to shine like no other. We see them with faults, but they are old enough to own up to them, and Lucy's faith is truly given great reward. Even better, I find, is the story of Edmund. A particular statement sits with me, when he calls to everyone's attention the considerable detail of their first encounter with the Wardrobe. It is here that I grow most fond of Edmund, for he shows that he really is a changed person, and has matured and grown knowing what is right. He has humility and a sort of righteous goodness to him. He realizes the truth of Lucy's sayings, and truly admits to his own faults, and shows real redemption. Lucy is likewise grateful for this, and while neither of them are willing to bend the norms of society for their ideas, it shows that Edmund is a real champion.

Of course, some of the best fun of this all is the showdown between the dwarf and Edmund and Susan as they come and return in their glory to the world of Narnia. Here we see the children coming back to their ancient lands of Cair Pavel, and what better way to make them return than to have their old weapons back!? I mean, it was great. Susan getting her bow...how *romantic sigh* oh yea. And the diamond vial and the sword and shield. Yes, if you can't tell I loved it. It really made my day.

Now there was something else that I really loved about this great book. At the end, when everyone is called back to return to their own world, I love the attitude of Peter and Susan there. It's so...surreal, in the way I thought about it. Again, I could be really reading into things here, but that's the way I understood it. The plain matter of fact style about the whole ordeal, and the saying goodbye; it just makes it wonderful. I really think I fell headlong for Susan at this point. I just imagined the future where she would be enjoying the old tales of Narnia with Peter as they hear the stories of Edmund and Lucy's adventures. My future looked very bright at this point. At had every reason to believe that everything was going to go well from then on.

Now, of course, the only other time that Susan shows up in the books after that and before the most important part, is the telling of how Susan gets to go to America. I was only dreaming of all the good things that she must have been learning there, but unfortunately, I was mistaken, as we shall learn later. (You have know idea how that one statement is weighing in on my mind at this very moment. ;-)). So of course, I can't wait to find out what is happening throughout the books. I continue to be im-

pressed with Edmund, and his general maturity in leadership and the whole shebang. Lucy of course grows on me, but she's still just not quite the style that I like, too...unrefined, I guess is the feeling.

Now, before we come to the head of my little situation, let's talk about the non-human character that just touched me. Let's just say that here's where I really relate with Lucy. Reepicheep. I LOVE that mouse. I mean, the one thing I want to see put into a movie format, would be the scene where Reep is going to say goodbye to everyone, and Lucy goes up and finally gives in to what she has always wanted to do, and cuddles that little mouse. The way I envision it is this noble and majestic mouse, sitting here about to go out on his greatest journey, and then Lucy comes and hugs him and starts petting his fur, taking him completely off guard for a split second, forming the comical scene, right before he loosens up and smiles a contented smile as he snuggles up right next to her. I can just see the little nose twitching, like a cat's purr, signaling the affection between them. Yes, I really am a pathetic little kid when it comes to that.

So now, let's skip ahead to what's really getting me. Here we are at the final book, "The Last Battle." The scene is set, and everything is perfect. I can't wait. I'm reading faster and faster as I go through this, hoping to see the great ending. I know it has to come, I can feel it coming on. The scene is meant to feel hopeless, and it does. I can look and finally everyone is thrown into the real Narnia. Boom, the rush keeps going further and further, and my heart is racing at this moment, as I come to what I know is surely the point that I have been waiting for the entire time.

I was given the little hint that this would all happen when Caspian saw them all at the round table. I love the response of Peter, as he immediately took action and started sizing up the situation. Everything had a great, "coming back" feel to it. The usage of the rings, which had almost been forgotten in time, was a great addition. But I am racing ahead of myself.

So here we are, the two last people from our world who are privy into Narnia, thrown into the barn. And lo, and behold, what is within? What else!? It's the great Narnian paradise! And who else should be standing there but all the great kings and queens of the old! We have Frank and his wife, Lucy, Edmund, Peter...wait, something is wrong, something is going off in the back of my head and something is beginning to feel foreboding. I can't take it, as I continue reading on, the feeling gets stronger, and then, the words start flowing into my mind consciously, the words that I can't even believe I am reading. It can't be, what? Is this true? I see Peter, just as the one he ought to be, and he declares:

"My sister Susan," answered Peter shortly and gravely; "is no longer a friend of Narnia."

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WWHHAT!!!? At this point I forget to breath, the smile on my face changes from a smile of pure joy to pure ironic, sardonic, and hysterical disbelief; I can't believe what I am reading, and I can't believe that what I am reading is actually there. It's not just a misread. I read it again and again. I am in such disbelief and horror that the wall on the other side of my room also reads, or feels, rather, the same passage with a harsh thud. It's terrible. About this point I remember that man must breath in order to stay conscious, and I have every intention of staying conscious, because I have more yelling and hyping and punching of beds, pillows and walls to do.

I read the passage more slowly this time, letting it sink in as I pour over every word that was spoken. Big mistake, I am not even more a sorry mess of confusing emotions. My love, the one character I have been waiting nearly the entire series to see return in her full glory, and she's WHAT!? My rage and anguish now turns to an even deeper depression as the ramification of this passage begin to make sense. I have gone and fallen for the one bad apple in the entire bunch. Things about my future marriage prospects, the likelihood of me doing the same thing, the spiritual ramifications and mental extrapolations of my decision soon become paramount. I am an utter failure. Not only do I have to deal

with my now broken love, the happiness and joy at seeing the rest of my beloved characters happy, but I also have to deal with the deeper thoughts of me falling by the waste side, choosing a woman whom I will eventually have to divorce, my pathetic inclinations to the selfish and the unworthy, the possibility of my utter demise, and, of course, all the overwhelming loneliness I suddenly feel without the pleasant company of characters whom I appreciate in a story.

This of course, ought to have been the end of my horror. I should not have had to go any further, and I should have been blessed with happy thoughts the rest of the book. But what did that genius of a writer Lewis do? No, he couldn't stand by and let me have some peace, instead, he had to go and have Lucy expound on what her sister was doing. And what do I learn? Oh, at this point the book once again nearly hits two walls and a lamp. She's WHAT???????

Oh yes, Lewis has seen it fit that Susan should not only have fallen to the waste side, but also that she should have fallen in the most horrid, disgusting manner possible.

I should take the time now to explain myself. For you see, if Lewis had been so kind as to claim that Susan had in some way lost her friendship with Narnia through a great depression, or something else. Perhaps she grew angry and has gone into a streak of murder-some rage or whatnot. I could live with that. There is a great deal of hope that she would be redeemed on that account. If she had gone and dove after something else, something truly horrendous in the normal sense, I would have been happy, such a sharp contrast would have given me enough distance to help my pain, though it still would have been a great burden. Lewis did not do this however. Instead, as Lucy puts it, all she talks about now is "nylons, lipstick, and invitations." Oh my gracious Father in heaven, why hast thou seen fit to torture my soul so horridly!? I believe I really did pray that. At this point I broke down. It was terrible. If you thought my other antics were great, and dramatic, nothing compared to this. If I were standing on a mountain on the edge, the best image would have been of my pacing circularly suddenly to stop, and then, the book slowly slipping out of my hands as I lose my breath and fall backwards into oblivion, as the book lands harshly on the ground, open to the very page I was reading, the dust swirling over the words I was reading.

Now, some of you will find this very strange. "Why on earth," you may ask, "would he be so upset over her lipstick, and not over her murdering someone??" My dear friends, you just don't understand. I am by nature a sympathetic person. And my care for the female race is beyond question. Within my quiet exterior lies the greatest of empathetic virtues, to the point where it hampers my daily routine, as I cry in my heart and soul for the thousands of poor misguided souls out there. But you see, I don't cry for the deep dark criminals. To me, those people have enough worrying to do, and they can easily see what is wrong. No, my plight is the modern day, selfish, conceited, apathetic, uncaring, party hungry, and devilishly immature (as the book amply says, "silly," though, I find that too kind a word) girl with a woman's body. You see, the softness, the beauty, the pathetic farce of sweet kindness. Oh, the pain! You really would have to know me to understand the plight I go through. It's something I have been doing since age 11, I have consistently and continually mourned over the pathetic, beautiful girls full of potential, but who are so naive and inconsiderate of God's good graces; who are not mature enough to understand the world and its ways, and to run from it, rather, embracing it as if it were all "good fun and games." And what did Lewis do but hit on the very point which most completely and utterly puts me into a rage of madness, where my mixed emotions of empathy, compassion, sorrow, anger, frustration, and kindness all come together and I am unable to act accordingly. These are the girls that most hurt me, because I see all the great things, and then bam! It's all lost in a moment.

The situation with Susan was even worse. For at least with most girls over whom I mourn in this manner, I don't know them all that well, and I only have to imagine what it was like before they became so misguided. But no, in this series I get to see Susan growing up, and becoming the misguided fool of a

woman she ends as. As I read, we saw the entire history laying itself out before us, and here we are presented not only with someone whom we knew had once been good, but who has now good bad in the most utterly terrible methods possible! Oh, you have no idea how much that just infuriates me! It is the worst mixture of sorrow, anger, and despair. How on earth could Lewis, of all people decide to do that to me?!

Again, there are deeper depths to which we might sink. For you see, if Lewis had only, at some time delivered up the ending of her life, either bad or good, I could be spared. But instead, while he is so completely, fully, and gloriously wrapping up the whole series for everyone else, the one, and I do mean only one, thread that he leaves unraveled, open to speculation, and yet so sure of end, is the very thread I most wanted to see completed and closed in triumphant glory! I mean, how bad can it get?? Not only must I deal with Susan falling away now, but I also have to know that I don't know what's going to happen next! I don't know what she'll be doing, I don't know where she'll be going, or how much worse she'll get; neither do I know whether there is any hope that she will come out of this, for her end seems sure. Still, Lewis has left the option so open, that I can't help but let those thoughts of hope and redemption creep into my mind; we know how desperately I desire this. So now I am left, at the end of a large number of books, the latter half of 800 pages to be more precise, not knowing if the very thing that had kept me so raptured, will ever come to be or not! I am stuck, not ever knowing whether or not my dear little Susan is going to find a way out of her stupidity and come back to the light, or if she shall instead die with the horrible disposition she is now, and be forever known as the one great Queen of Narnia, Queen Susan the Gentle, most beautiful, and impossibly refined and noble, who lost her salvation, position, honor, glory, and dignity to become nothing more than a hobbling socialite, and suffer the black depths of nothingness and loneliness for it.

The last biting edge is cut within as I continue to understand the books. For as one says, "Some must fall away," and when you look at the choices at hand, there is none but Susan who could have possibly have been the choice. How could I be so blind!? I am left now with the liberty, therefore, to add stupidity and imprudence to my long list of negatives in this whole matter, only made more sharp by the beautiful contrast that is Lewis' Genius and wonderful, perfectly orchestrated ending.

Now, methinks, you all will understand why I wanted to just write my opinion on this in a cryptic prose rather than in the plain English that everyone might understand. You see, everything here is detailed and accurately portrayed in that post and entry. Instead, you all now have had to waste countless minutes of your day reading the explanation, rather than grasping intuitively at the entire feeling through the prose. It is my hope, however, that having read this, you will be able to go back to the prose and understand my feelings even more fully.

Some of you will no doubt find me quite pathetic: falling in love with fantastic young folk who are not even of modern marriage age, extrapolating the smallest details into character predictions, and despairing over fiction. Well, what can I say? It touches me, and I am wounded. It is written, and lives vividly in my mind still. This is the consequence of living within your mind, and living in a world which is only abstractly understood in relation to the outside world.

There we go...my translation of my previous post. I hope that you all have enjoyed this, and I hope that you all can find yourselves able to still talk to me after understanding the seriousness of my condition. Adieu.