



Preface

## Through the Wardrobe: Our Passport to Narnia



I hope you're not the kind of reader who always skips the preface, because this one is really important. I know you expect all authors to say that, but in this case it really is true. To understand the kind of book I have written and how to get the most out of it, you really need to make it all the way through the preface. Just pretend it is called "chapter 1." Your adventure in Narnia really does start here, and it begins with my clever explanation of my book's title.



If you're puzzled by the title of this book about *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, it is either because you have already read all The Chronicles—or you haven't. Sound paradoxical? If you have read them, you know that the title phrase comes *not* from this volume but rather from the last tale of The Chronicles, *The Last Battle*; if you haven't read *The Last Battle*, then you need some explanation of the phrase. And thereafter both sets of my readers deserve a defense of its use here.

In *The Last Battle*—no worries, there are no real spoilers ahead for those who may not have gotten to it yet—the Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve make some surprising discoveries about the future of Narnia and their place in it. It seems only fitting that I draw my title from Mr. Tumnus, an alumnus, pardon the pun, of the White Witch's wintry, stony grip, rescued by Aslan, who explains near the climax of



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*The Last Battle* that, in the end, all the faithful followers of Aslan get to go “further up and further in.”

What does this mean? That they are privileged to fathom the true meaning of their lives and embrace the depth, height, and width of his great love for us. There is no end to Narnia, for it is “larger on the inside than it is on the outside,” and there is no end to the surprise of joy and the glory of living in righteousness forever and ever in Aslan’s presence. It is a picture, in other words, of our entry into eternity where we may by grace hear the words, “Well done, my good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master.”

That is what our goal is on both sides of the wardrobe: to go “further up and further in,” to discover and remain in Aslan’s presence, following his lead, completing the missions he sets for us, and gaining glorious comrades along the way to share grand adventures in the Spirit. We want to know what it means to be a Narnian, so we can learn better how to be a Son of Adam or a Daughter of Eve. But how, you ask, might we go “further up and further in” *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*?

### **Starting *in Medias Res*: Our Passport to Narnia**

Let’s start by explaining a bit why we are starting *here*, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, rather than *somewhere else*. Who wants to know the end of the story before the beginning? Where’s the suspense, the surprise, the climax in that? When we first enter Narnia, our passport is “through the wardrobe,” and if we are getting there at all, we are getting there *in medias res*—“in the middle of things.” We don’t know what or where Narnia is, or what has happened to bring about its dreadful circumstances (“always winter and never Christmas”). We must read to find out. We have to pursue the text further up and further in to discover “the context” and the “chronology.”

That is precisely the way the Pevensie children, with the help of Professor Kirke, must proceed. But isn’t that the way we enter our world, too? We don’t get to choose our parents or our continent or our fingerprints—and certainly not the stories that preceded





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us or any of the stories that may come after. We must learn as we go, guided by generous and helpful counselors.

Every human life is itself a story, a walking history. We are just inserted into the dialogue and flow of life that God has chosen. Thank goodness! For imagine our being invested with the decision of when and how to enter history, under what conditions, speaking what language, or perhaps none at all? (Think of the Father preparing his Son for his incarnate entry into our world.) Ah, the plot thickens! We are not wise enough, nor are we courageous enough to do that. Who could say for sure she is equipped and “ready” to enter this world when and where she pleases? But you see, the same is true of our entry into all human stories.

Think about it. Of course, we eventually want to learn about our origins, the day we were born, how illustrious our ancestors were, what clever things we said when we were young. And who hasn’t longed to sit at his grandparents’ side or mother’s knee and hear again the story of some poignant episode from childhood? Yes, we want to know where we came from and what happened before we got here. But we may not want or need to know all of that before we can get on with our unfolding story in the present. It is usually when something happens in our lives that begs the question about what happened before. “Mommy, what was it like in our house before I came?”

C. S. Lewis felt the same way. His favorite stories as a child just had him jumping into the fray, entering where he could and as he could. Ignoring the “back story” at the start lest it obscure the story before him, Lewis loved to enter the world without a precise map so he could discover things for himself. The reason this is important, if you have not guessed by now, is that once upon a time *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was the first of the stories to be written and published and was the Narnian tale most readers started with from 1950 until the 1980s. But now *The Magician’s Nephew* is listed first in the current publisher’s order, followed by *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. This change was made presumably so that new readers would have to start their safari into Narnia at its “beginning,” thus prescribing a “chronological reordering.”





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I beg to differ, as do, thankfully, the makers of the recent Narnian movie series, who wisely set out themselves to start with *The Lion*. They too wish to have us enter Narnia through the wardrobe first—rather than through the use of, say, “magic rings,” the means by which one particular Son of Adam and Daughter of Eve go to and fro in *The Magician’s Nephew*. (Hmmm. Sound like any other famous fairy tale you may have recently read or seen a movie about?) The truth is, we do not really have reasons to care about the origins of Narnia (which are, indeed, revealed in *The Magician’s Nephew*) until we have first been there to discover for ourselves what has happened; and then we will find ourselves curious about how things got that way, hungry for history, and, perhaps, chronology.

Quite honestly, the way in which the rest of the Narnian tales unfold and what they demand and forecast in terms of dramatic impact and progression of plot are honored best by starting with the story of Aslan’s redemption of Narnia and his defeat of the White Witch. (The true parallel here, in my mind, is between the Old and New Testaments; when we wish to introduce someone to “the way, the truth, and the life,” do we start with the Gospels or with Genesis? Eventually, we will get to Beginnings, but the story of Jesus is the real motivation to read the story of Genesis; his “new” story in the Gospels validates and fulfills the “old” story in obvious historical and literary ways.)

There are some neat surprises and not a few ironies revealed in *The Magician’s Nephew* that are, in fact, “spoiled” if we do not read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* first. I won’t tell you what those are, but those who have read them both know what I mean. Now there may be good reasons to *study* Narnia in a certain order, the way some literary critics do, but to *read* them in chronological order the first time we encounter them? By no means.

To me, and the vast majority of Chronicles readers I have met or taught, the best way to enter Narnia will always be through the wardrobe, that is, through the order in which they were drafted and published by Lewis. In this order the progressive revelation of Aslan’s character and Narnian history are best encountered. Narnia did not begin with Lewis creating a tight outline of its history and a detailed catalog of key “personnel”





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who would inhabit this landscape, coupled with the marshaling of voluminous historical data or a geographically exhaustive series of maps (the way, for instance, Lewis's friend J. R. R. Tolkien apparently invented Middle-Earth).

I am aware that Lewis once exchanged letters with a little boy named Laurence, who proposed, against his mother's protestations, reading *The Chronicles* in "chronological order," that is, following the order of events as sequenced in "Narnian time." This would mean reading *The Chronicles* in this order: *The Magician's Nephew*, then *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Horse and His Boy*, *Prince Caspian*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *The Silver Chair*, and *The Last Battle*. But Lewis's apparent endorsement of his young correspondent's entreaty is to me just an example of his graciousness and desire to reward the earnestness (and precociousness) of a young reader who probably reminded him just a little of himself. In that same letter Lewis confesses, "So perhaps it does not matter very much in what order anyone reads them. I'm not even sure that all the others were written in the same order in which they were published. I never keep notes of that sort of thing and never remember dates."<sup>1</sup> There is, for me, a certain fitness and propriety in proceeding with the narrative order that first led Lewis into Narnia himself: an unexpected and unannounced encounter with Aslan, which we will explore in the first chapter. And that means starting with *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

### **How *Further Up and Further In* Tries to Be Different: An Inside-out Approach**

I wanted in writing *Further Up and Further In* to provide both novice and experienced readers something that will increase their enjoyment every time they come to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (or the movie made of it). *Further Up and Further In* won't explore every possible detail you may want to know about Narnia because that is not its design, and there is plenty to be discovered that this small volume could not possibly include. I had no incentive to provide encyclopedic coverage of each jot and tittle because Paul Ford's wonderful volume *Companion to Narnia* (cited later in "For Further Reading") already does that.





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The truth is, literary encyclopedias provide a specific service and are useful particularly after we have put the book down. They represent an “outside-in” approach—forging facts and compiling connections exterior to the text and using them to interpret and elucidate what you have already read long after you have left the intimate setting of the book itself. They draw you naturally outside the world the tale has created; they occupy you with things and ideas and people the book points to and try to answer nagging questions you may have. And then, at their best, like Ford’s *Companion to Narnia*, they will send you back to the text for more interaction with Aslan and his creation. But at their worst—and I am afraid this is what most encyclopedias do—they may take you “further out and further away” and, in this case, force you to remain an outsider to the continuing experience of Narnia. (One can become an “expert” on Narnia, so to speak, without ever living there. What a pity!)

A large part of what makes Narnia terrific, engrossing, and life-changing is its ability not only to deliver a world that is strange and compelling but also to make *our own world* strange and compelling as well. Its genius, if you will, is its ability to make us long for a world like Aslan’s and then to help us discover in ours the evidence that Aslan has been here too, and to motivate us to uncover the implications of that visit. A Narnian sojourn makes us dissatisfied with our world for all the right reasons and then points us to a pathway to our true home and our true identity. Indeed, that is what any reading of *The Chronicles* ought to evince and maybe even what a book about *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* should do as well!

That indeed is my challenge in *Further Up and Further In*. I am attempting what I call an “inside-out” approach, designed to increase your appreciation for the strangeness and oddness of what is going on inside Aslan’s story on several levels while we are inside Narnia, not outside of it. I don’t want you to spend a minute more outside the text than you have to because our time in Narnia is too precious to waste in search of external sources. *The Chronicles* tell a simple story on the surface but one that is actually clever and complex and thus one that repays many visits and rereadings. At the same time, because of those very revisits, our experiences threaten to become commonplace and





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ordinary. My job is to help you keep coming back to Narnia and finding it as exhilarating and as disarmingly fresh as the first time you visited it. A tall order, yes, but one worth the risk. Fortunately, Lewis has written just the sort of work that enables us to enjoy that freshness every time!

This is what I call an “indigenous” approach to Narnia, and I derive it primarily from recommendations that Lewis himself makes in *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1961), his most extended statement about good reading and what it consists of, as well as its enduring value. In this book, whose title belies its actual vitality and poignancy, Lewis argues that modern readers are often handicapped by would-be critics and so-called “helpful” reviewers who end up reducing great works to matters of mere taste (“read this and you will show how ‘contemporary’ your thinking is”), mere paraphrase (“all this book really means is . . .”), or mere form (“yes, the themes and characters here are ghastly, but notice how beautifully written the work is”). The peril of such stilted forms of reading is that it can turn readers into *users* rather than *receivers* of the words and worlds offered to them by writers. And for Lewis this is the worst possible destiny for an author or his work.

Users of texts reduce the meaning and impact of the works to what they can successfully paraphrase and what already fits into their preexisting worldview. In other words, they read down to their current level of insight and being—making a book say what they want it to say, delivering only the experiences they wish to repeat, closing themselves off to anything new, challenging, or different. Receivers of texts, by contrast, willingly enter the worlds of their author and reside there with respect, curiosity, and anticipation. They take the risk of reading things they may disagree with or not understand completely but do so wisely, not naïvely; they are open to discovery and to wrestling with novel circumstances. Here is Lewis’s comely way of expressing this in another of his volumes:

One man carries his Englishry abroad with him and brings it home unchanged. Wherever he goes he consorts with the other English tourists. By a good hotel he means one that is like an English hotel. He complains of





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the bad tea where he might have had excellent coffee. But there is another sort of traveling and another sort of reading. You can eat the local food and drink the local wines, you can share the foreign life, you can begin to see the foreign country as it looks, not to the tourist, but to its inhabitants. You can come home modified, thinking and feeling as you did not think and feel before. . . .

I should hope to choose this second way of traveling and reading, for I will then be led by it to newer and fresher enjoyments, things I could never have met . . . modes of feeling, flavours, atmospheres, nowhere accessible. . . . I have lived nearly sixty years with myself and my own century and am not so enamoured of either as to desire no glimpse of a world beyond them.<sup>2</sup>

This is the way we too wish to traverse Narnia, as receivers, eyes and ears open, trying not to import too many of our own tried-and-true, and therefore, “orchestrated” experiences but rather desiring a *“glimpse of a world beyond them.”* (Please note that this is not a liberal versus conservative posture, for readers of various convictions and alignments can be caught in the trap of using texts and thus blunting their impact. Anyone who has ever proof texted a Bible verse to “prove” an improbable point is a user, no matter how salutary his overall convictions may be.)

Lewis thus taught his students that a text is both something *said (logos)* and something *made (poiema)*. An author fashions a world (and thereby reveals a worldview) in whatever he writes and offers the reader an open invitation to inhabit that world—to become incarnate within it for as long as she finds it interesting, challenging, engaging. (No reader, by the way, is ever under obligation to stay with a text that is actually injurious or just plain confusing to her. This is spiritual discernment, not “using” texts in Lewis’s “abusive” sense.) The role of the reader is thus clearly complementary to the role of the writer.

The reader agrees to enter a new landscape and is therein asked by the writer to leave behind her prejudices, expectations, and preferences, all the while trying to see, feel, hear, touch, and taste the world the author has invented. The author’s *logos*





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(message) and *poiema* (literary form) contribute to the enjoyment and the education of the reader—but only if the reader is not attempting to circumvent the reader process by “using” the text for her own purposes but rather endeavors to “receive” the text on its own merits.

According to Lewis, any book that is reducible to either a paraphrase of its message or a simple tracing of its form is not a work worthy of the reader’s ongoing attention. What he loved in literature, and what he hoped to produce in Narnia, is a tale whose form and whose message were united and inseparable—an “incarnate” word—whose pleasure and whose meaning had to be experienced together or not at all. Long before Marshall McLuhan said it famously, Lewis knew that “the medium is the message,” and vice versa.

#### Finding Our Way into Narnia

But, you ask, “So what?” I admit Lewis’s argument is intricate and multifaceted, and I am close to oversimplifying it here, something neither practical nor fair to him. Let me just summarize its relevance for *Further Up and Further In* by saying: Lewis believed we should read actively so we could “transcend” ourselves and “enlarge our being” by encountering new worlds and fresh perspectives as we travel expectantly within an author’s landscape. My job, following Lewis’s tenets, is thus to keep you *inside* Narnia, inside the wardrobe so to speak, as long as possible, choosing the right moments to remind, illustrate, compel you to look again through the eyes of the Pevensie children and the other Narnians in the tale through both direct commentary and intriguing sidebars.

We shall simply see what we find as we travel together, trying neither to race ahead nor to preclude your own unique discoveries. My comments through the *Further Up and Further In*’s six chapters are offered to highlight and intimate rather than inhibit or obscure the Narnian worldview. Along the way this also means, inevitably, that I may need to allude to and/or carefully examine settings, characters, circumstances, and outcomes that explain why *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* might indeed remind





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us of a *certain other story* that took place in our world—and the difference that should make to us.

*Further Up and Further In* is designed in the end to be a companion rather than an intruder in your enjoyment of the work. It tries to walk beside you without spoiling the view. You know the difference, right? A wily companion says, “Wow, did you notice that beautiful tree back there? Want to take a closer look?” The intruder says, “Stop this instant! We must go back and video that tree, take a specimen home, and Google it when we get to my laptop so we can verify each and every one of its features.” The companion says, “Yes, let’s stay a while and ponder”; the intruder says, “Let’s take this out of its natural context and put it under the microscope.” To put it another way, using another of Lewis’s useful metaphors, we want to “look *along*” Narnia, as well as “look *at* it.” We’re not just gathering “data”; we’re participating in an adventure too!<sup>3</sup>

My plan for an inside-out, indigenous trek into Narnia is different from this intruder mentality. There are seventeen chapters in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (LWW), seventeen precisely paced and elegantly plotted chapters that, to me, fall into five distinct groupings by which I will guide your reflections on your reading:

Chapters 1–3 of LWW (“Finding What You’re Not Looking For”) introduce us to the Pevenies and to the professor and prepare us for what lies just beyond the wardrobe door through the fur coats. Chapters 4–6 of LWW (“Turkish Delights and Other Tempting Confections”) reveal the heart of darkness lurking in each of us and what has happened to one particular being who has completely given herself over to evil. Chapters 7–9 of LWW (“Hospitality Is as Hospitality Does”) teach us about what hospitality and friendship really entail and why the wickedness dominating Narnia cannot endure as long as faithful friends pursue righteousness. Chapters 10–13 of LWW (“Aslan on the Move”) demonstrate what happens when Aslan is on the move and why we can and must trust him. Chapters 14–17 of LWW (“Deep Magic Is Never Enough”) inform us about why Deep Magic can only tell us when we have gone wrong and can’t of itself right that wrong. The climax and aftermath accentuate the mighty power of Aslan and the deeper magic that redeems and surpasses the knowledge from the dawn of time.





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For each thematic grouping I have thus written my own chapter containing a companion overview and relevant commentary that will highlight the flow of the narrative in these groupings with an eye on what's happening and the significance of what we see and hear. As appropriate, toward the end of each chapter, I also gently identify some emerging themes and a few character traits, and then notice a few personal discoveries that the children and the full-time Narnian residents make along the way. And, oh, yes, occasionally I have provided some "outside" information as unobtrusively as possible, a kind of working glossary of key terms that may add to your enjoyment. At the end of the book, I have also compiled some useful discussion questions to guide a group or personal study of this exciting tale.

Here come my six chapters. I start in chapter 1 with a focused introduction to the life and work of C. S. Lewis and his love of fairy tales and the reason that is important. Such a compact chapter cannot at all do justice to the marvel of his range of endeavor, incredible fruitfulness, and continuing impact. But who he is and what he did are in some ways not as important as what and why he wrote, and he would be the first to tell us this.

Since I am the one writing *this* book, and you have been so kind as to accept my plea to read this preface and have indeed made it to its last paragraph, let me be the first to tell you this about him.

