

Out of the Silent Planet Study Guide

by Andrew Clausen
For the novel by C. S. Lewis



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Synopsis

While on a walking tour through England, Dr. Elwin Ransom becomes an unwilling guest at the home of Dr. Weston, a physicist. Weston and his colleague Dr. Devine kidnap Ransom and take him to the planet Malacandra. Ransom believes that he is meant to be handed over to the inhabitants of Malacandra as a human sacrifice. On Malacandra, Weston and Devine try to present Ransom to the beings that come to meet them, but Ransom panics and escapes when the men are attacked by a large sea creature.

Alone on an alien world, Ransom discovers that he has no survival skills that apply to his surroundings. Barely able to tell the difference between animals and plants or plants and rocks, he is unsure what to trust as safe—even his sanity begins to dissolve. Driven by curiosity, he establishes contact with what appears to be a friendly seal-like animal. The creature gives him food and drink and takes him to its village.

Ransom settles into a peaceful life with these beings, the hrossa, and slowly finds his ideas about life, religion, and humanity stretched to new horizons. But before long, Ransom is summoned before the ruler of Malacandra. Fearfully and humbly, Ransom travels to meet the mysterious ruler of this strange world. Once again, Ransom finds his assumptions about life and the workings of the universe shattered.

Out of the Silent Planet is the first of three books by C.S. Lewis about Dr. Ransom. Ransom's adventures are continued in *Perelandra* and *That Hideous Strength*.

Chapters 18, 19, & 20

Vocabulary:

Match the words on the left with their definitions on the right.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| ___ decorous | a. humiliation |
| ___ consistory | b. hot; oppressive, as in weather |
| ___ diminution | c. descendants |
| ___ sultry | d. a small boat |
| ___ bier | e. sounding full and resonant |
| ___ vigilantly | f. proper |
| ___ mortification | g. a frame for carrying a coffin or corpse |
| ___ conciliating | h. a decrease |
| ___ sonorous | i. understanding |
| ___ posterity | j. court; tribunal |
| ___ ken | k. reconciling; soothing |
| ___ coracle | l. tirelessly on the alert |

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Questions:

1. How had fear driven Ransom since he first left Earth?
2. What does Ransom learn from Oyarsa about the history of Earth?
3. Who is the Bent One?
4. We say an event has irony if the outcome is opposite of what is expected. How is Weston's response to Oyarsa ironic?
5. Oyarsa says the lord of the silent planet has "bent" Weston and "broken" Devine. Explain what he means by this.

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Dig Deeper:

6. Ransom was surprised to learn that since the men had left Earth, Oyarsa had been directing some events (such as sending the hnakra) in order to bring Ransom to him. Ransom felt that his decision to come to Oyarsa was all his own. Was Ransom acting on his own will or was Oyarsa controlling his destiny? Explain your answer.

7. When Oyarsa asks Ransom to tell him what Maleldil has done in Thulcandra, Ransom is interrupted before he can answer. What do you think Ransom would have said?

8. Ransom has come to the point where he has voluntarily surrendered his will for a greater good. Weston's philosophy supports forcing others to surrender their wills for a greater good. ("Small claims must give way to great," he says in Chapter 4.) In both cases a higher need is met. What makes these two attitudes different? What value is there in willingly surrendering compared to being forced to surrender?

9. Weston claims that the law of "survival of the fittest" has made civilized man the highest form of life. What human achievements does Weston list as proof of man's right to dominate Malacandra? Do these achievements rightly demonstrate man superiority? Why or why not?

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5. It looked very like a delusion produced by his illness.

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

6. The dangers to be feared are not planetary but cosmic, or at least solar, and they are not temporal, but eternal.

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

7. “They do get (as you would say) ‘elevated’ but not drunk on a gaudy night—of which they have many.”

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

8. “But whether he meant that they were a different species, or only that they were some special military caste . . . , I don’t know.”

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

Questions:

1. When Ransom finally gets a chance to answer Oyarsa’s questions about Thulcandra, Oyarsa responds “You have shown me more wonders than are known in the whole of heaven.” Why do you think Oyarsa responded in this way?

Answer Key

Note: Most of the questions in Progeny Press study guides deal with students' understanding and interpretation of issues in the novel; therefore, most answers will be individual to the student. Progeny Press answer keys are designed to be as inclusive as possible for the teacher and/or parent, giving enough background and information to judge whether the student has grasped the essence of the issue and the question. We try to point out some directions students' answers might take, which directions might be best, and some errors that may appear. Students are not expected to answer as completely as the answers provided in the Answer Key.

Chapters 1 & 2

Vocabulary:

1. curse; 2. cheerfully optimistic; 3. stubbornly persistent; 4. a thicket or grove of small trees; 5. hearty burst of laughter; 6. ethical objections, conscience; 7. filthiness, wretchedness; 8. reproduce.

A philologist would be interested in the study of languages and their histories.

Questions:

1. The woman was upset because her son, Harry, hadn't yet returned from The Rise, Dr. Weston's home and laboratory.
2. Ransom enjoyed being alone, detached, and consulting no one but himself.
3. Accept reasonable responses. Ransom most likely believes that he controls his own destiny.
4. When Devine heard that no one knew where Ransom was, he decided that Ransom would be a good replacement for Harry. He arranged for Ransom to be drugged in order to kidnap him and take him to Malacandra.
5. Accept reasonable responses. The discussion shows they value people only by their intelligence and utility. They show disregard for other life. The dog, for example, was destroyed in an experiment. The discussion also shows that they put themselves above the law.
6. Accept reasonable responses. In their estimation, life itself has no value. What one does with his life may have value to Weston and Devine if that life is devoted to supporting their cause or upholds the things they uphold, such as science and education.

Dig Deeper:

7. Accept reasonable responses. Ransom shows concern for the boy, Harry, but Weston and Devine have put their ambitions above any need of others.
8. Responses will vary.

Chapters 3, 4, 5 & 6

Vocabulary:

g-lassitude; d-prosaic; a-portentous; e-megalomaniac; c-tremulous; i-vivisection; k-alacrity; f-loquacious; h-ethereal; b-vacuity; j-empyrean.

Questions:

1. Weston means that Ransom's rights as an individual are nullified by Weston's plan, which Weston sees as a higher cause. Weston justifies kidnapping Ransom because Ransom is needed in his plan.