

Perelandra

Study Guide

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For the novel by C. S. Lewis



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Synopsis

Lewis (the fictionalized character of C.S. Lewis) is called to the home of his friend Dr. Elwin Ransom on “business.” The business turns out to be preparing Ransom for a supernaturally commanded and orchestrated journey to Perelandra, the planet Venus. Ransom tells Lewis he must also expect a summons from Oyarsa, ruler of Malacandra (Mars), at which time he and a doctor must be prepared for Ransom’s return. After many months the summons comes. Ransom returns and relates to them the story of Perelandra.

A world of seas and floating, multicolored islands, Perelandra is filled with mystical creatures and almost overpowering pleasures. Only two people inhabit this Garden of Eden—the beautiful and innocent Green Lady, and the King, from whom she has been separated. But shortly after Ransom arrives, so does another man from Earth, a physicist named Weston. Ransom and Weston had tangled before when Weston and a colleague kidnapped Ransom and took him to Malacandra for what they assumed was going to be a human sacrifice by the Malacandrian natives. Weston’s mission on Malacandra had been the extermination of the native races in preparation for human colonization. Ransom expects no better in this Perelandrian confrontation.

Through Weston a deadly evil enters Perelandra, intent on bringing sin and death to the planet. The evil one tries to deceive the Lady into joining its cause as Ransom continuously parries and reveals its deceits. As he and the Lady begin to weary and weaken under the bombardment of half-truths and emotional trauma, Ransom realizes he has one last avenue of attack. Almost without hope, but relying on the One who sent him, Ransom enters into final battle with his enemy.

Perelandra is in turns sensual and philosophical, theological and physical, challenging our senses and our understanding of truth and will.

Chapter 7

Vocabulary:

Antonyms are words with opposite meanings. Use the book to find and study each word below. Choose an appropriate antonym and define the word and antonym. You may use a thesaurus. The first one is done for you.

1. egoism: the belief that man's concern with self is the basis of morality

antonym: altruism—The belief that all should be done for others without any thought of self

2. fluency:

antonym:

3. magnanimity:

antonym:

4. incredulity:

antonym:

5. rigours:

antonym:

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3. To whom or what does Weston make a total commitment?

Analysis:

4. What assumption does Weston make about Ransom and the Green Lady? How does this compare with Ransom's attitude toward her? Which man best exemplifies the traits described in Philippians 4:8?

5. At their first meeting on the beach, Ransom finds himself "admiring [Weston's] massive egoism." The Greek word for overweening pride is *hubris* and refers to pride so deep that it must lead to the character's downfall, generally because the character defies the laws of the gods. Do you think Weston has hubris? List three mannerisms and three statements of Weston's that support your answer.

Mannerisms

-
-
-

Statements

-
-
-

Dig Deeper:

9. In his lecture to Ransom, Weston says he “became a convinced believer in emergent evolution. All is one.” He goes on to say “Man in himself is nothing. The forward movement of Life—the growing spirituality—is everything. . . . To spread spirituality, not to spread the human race, is henceforth my mission.” How does Weston define spirituality? What does he mean “All is one”?

Read Genesis 1 and 2. How does this compare with Weston’s assertion that “all is one” and all is a “blind, inarticulate purposiveness thrusting its way upward . . . in an endless unity of differentiated achievements towards an ever-increasing complexity of organisation”?

10. Divorcing these philosophies from the characters of Weston and Ransom and leaving the fictional framework in which C.S. Lewis has placed them, think of yourself as believing first in Weston’s philosophy, then in Ransom’s. Can Weston’s philosophy give your life worthwhile purpose? Can Ransom’s? Can you feel measurably good under Weston’s philosophy? Under Ransom’s? Would you rather your friends adhered to Weston’s beliefs or to Ransom’s? Explain why.

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Questions:

1. A tragedy queen.
2. The Tempter.
3. Fear. No.
4. "This can't go on."

Analysis:

5. Death and sorrow. Answers will vary.
6. Possible adjectives: huge, dim, pitifully childish, complacently arrogant, timid, meticulous, unoriginating, sluggish, ox-like. Answers will vary. He may be trying to subtly break the perfect spiritual unity she has with the King. He may be trying to get the Lady to mentally and emotionally distance herself from the King so she will be more likely to act alone.
7. Facts: a command from Maleldil, uncertainty of results of breaking the command, present great happiness.
8. Ransom sees her as a woman an earth-born man could love. Answers will vary. Seeing her as an object of desire is against their natures and against Maleldil's purpose. The mingling of love, desire, and sex is a powerful mental and emotional seed that once planted grows rapidly. If Ransom allowed it to take root, it could have destroyed his ability to act effectively and with pure motives.
9. Ransom believes he must somehow kill the Un-man.

Dig Deeper:

10. In the first dialogue he felt he had done his best and could now stop. In the second he realized that God required no more of him than that he continue to do his best—but God also would accept no less. He was not expected to do anything that he was not capable of doing, and he felt he could continue.
11. Answers will vary.
12. Answers will vary. Possibilities: It is the night before Jesus submits to crucifixion, it is the night before Ransom goes to fight the Un-man. All sleep but Jesus, all sleep but Ransom. Jesus asks for a reprieve but submits to the Father's will, Ransom seek a way out but submits to Maleldil's will.

Chapters 12, 13, & 14

Vocabulary:

1. parody; a composition (story, song, poem) that mimics another in an amusing way; 2. prosaic; humdrum, dull; 3. mythopoeic; giving rise to myths; 4. mandrill; a large fierce, gregarious baboon of West Africa; 5. ken; range of vision 6. congruity; agreement and harmony; 7. anthropomorphic; applying human characteristics to nonhuman things; 8. arboreal; of, or living in, trees; 9. diffused; spread thinly, extended, scattered; 10. aperture; hole, opening; 11. extrapolation; to predict by projecting past experience or data; 12. inscrutable; hard to grasp, mysterious, hard to interpret; 13. practicable; possible to do, feasible; 14. indeterminacy; not precisely determined or fixed. vagueness; 15. perpendicular; at right angles to the horizon, to rise up in a steep face like a cliff; 16. omnipotent; Almighty, having virtually unlimited authority and power; 17. munificence; lavishness, liberality; 18. concourse; junction, merging, the act of meeting.

Questions:

1. By riding the backs of fish.