

Discussion Guide

Out of the Silent Planet, chs 17–23



OPEN

“Ransom felt a tingling of his blood and a prickling on his fingers as if lightning were near him; and his heart and body seemed to him to be made of water.

Oyarsa spoke — a more unhuman voice than Ransom had yet heard, sweet and seemingly remote; an unshaken voice: a voice, as one of the *hrossa* afterwards said to Ransom, ‘with no blood in it. Light is instead of blood for them.’

‘What are you so afraid of, Ransom of Thulcandra?’ it said.

‘Of you, Oyarsa, because you are unlike me and I cannot see you.’

‘Those are not great reasons. You are also unlike me, and, though I see you, I see you very faintly. But do not think we are utterly unlike. We are both copies of Maleldil.’”

– *Oyarsa and Ransom*, ch. 18, pp. 118–119



Entry

1. Have you ever encountered a person, or presence, who seemed to make you feel simultaneously afraid and welcome, nervous and delighted? What does it feel like to encounter the holy?



Recall

1. How does Ransom experience Meldilorn? What things does he find there and how does this further develop his understanding of Malacandrian society? *chs. 17–18*
2. How does Oyarsa evaluate Ransom’s character? How has he changed over the course of this novel? What role has he been given, and how does he go about fulfilling it? *chs. 20–21*



Analysis

1. What does Ransom learn about the history of Thulcandra, the Silent Planet? How does this description relate to the biblical narratives? Does it challenge or enhance your imagination of our history? *chs. 19–20*
2. How does Oyarsa react to Weston and Devine differently? What is the difference between a “bent” and a “broken” *hnau*? *ch. 20*
3. What stood out to you about Weston’s grand speeches before Oyarsa? How does Ransom’s translation attempt reveal the truth behind his rhetoric? What examples of this kind of thinking have you encountered? *ch. 20*
4. Weston finds the bent Oyarsa of Thulcandra more admirable than Maleldil. What might it look like to take someone of Weston’s philosophy and combine it with spiritual darkness? *chs. 20–22*



DIVING DEEPER

“To you I may seem a vulgar robber, but I bear on my shoulders the destiny of the human race. Your tribal life with its stone-age weapons and beehive huts, its primitive coracles and elementary social structure, has nothing to compare with our civilization — with our science, medicine and law, our armies, our architecture, our commerce, and our transport system which is rapidly annihilating space and time. Our right to supersede you is the right of the higher over the lower. Life —”

“Half a moment,” said Ransom. “That’s about as much as I can manage at one go.” Then, turning to Oyarsa, he began translating as well as he could:

“Among us, Oyarsa, there is a kind of *hnau* who will take other *hnaus*’ food and — and things, when they are not looking. He says he is not an ordinary one of that kind. He says what he does now will make very different things happen to those of our people who are not yet born. [...] Because of all this, he says it would not be the act of a bent *hnau* if our people killed all your people.”

“Life is greater than any system of morality; her claims are absolute. It is not by tribal taboos and copy-book maxims that she has pursued her relentless march from the amoeba to man and from man to civilization.”

“He says,” began Ransom, “that living creatures are stronger than the question whether an act is bent or good — no, that cannot be right — he says it is better to be alive and bent than to be dead — no — he says, he says — I cannot say what he says, Oyarsa, in your language.”

ch. 20, pp. 134–35 (abridged)



Reflection

1. How does Ransom feel in the presence of Oyarsa? What does his experience remind you of in our own world? *ch. 13*
2. The distinction between a “bent” and a “broken” *hnau* is one of Lewis’s most memorable ideas. What examples from your own life — or from public life — does this distinction remind you of? *ch. 20*

“I see now how the lord of the silent world has bent you. There are laws that all *hnau* know, of pity and straight dealing and shame and the like, and one of these is the love of kindred. He has taught you to break all of them except this one, which is not one of the greatest laws; this one he has bent till it becomes folly and has set it up, thus bent, to be a little, blind *Oyarsa* in your brain. And now you can do nothing but obey it, though if we ask you why it is a law you can give no other reason for it than for all the other and greater laws which it drives you to disobey. Do you know why he has done this?”

“Me think no such person - me wise, new man - no believe all that old talk.”

“I will tell you. He has left you this one because a bent *hnau* can do more evil than a broken one. He has only bent you; but this Thin One who sits on the ground he has broken, for he has left him nothing but greed. He is now only a talking animal and in my world he could do no more evil than an animal. If he were mine I would unmake his body, for the *hnau* in it is already dead. But if you were mine I would try to cure you. Tell me, Thick One, why did you come here?”

– *Oyarsa and Weston, ch. 20, pp. 137–138*

3. Lewis hopes to convince at least 1% of readers to shift their thinking from “Space” to “Heaven.” What can his imagination of Malacandra do to broaden your own? Are you part of that 1%? Why or why not? *chs. 22–23*