

Discussion Guide

That Hideous Strength, chs 13–15



OPEN

“The poison was brewed in these West lands but it has spat itself everywhere by now. However far you went you would find the machines, the crowded cities, the empty thrones, the false writings, the barren beds: men maddened with false promises and soured with true miseries, worshipping the iron works of their own hands, cut off from Earth their mother and from the Father in Heaven. You might go East so far that East became West and you returned to Britain across the great Ocean, but even so you would not have come out anywhere into the light. The shadow of one dark wing is over all Tellus... And this ... is why we have no way left at all save the one I told you. The Hideous Strength holds all this Earth in its fist to squeeze as it wishes. But for their one mistake, there would be no hope left. If of their own evil will they had not broken the frontier and let in the celestial Powers, this would be their moment of victory. Their own strength has betrayed them. They have gone to the gods who would not have come to them, and pulled down Deep Heaven on their heads. Therefore, they will die.”

- Ransom to Merlin, Ch 13, p. 290–91



ENTRY

1. How does Ransom’s description of “The Hideous Strength” resonate (or not) with your understanding of the world today?



RECALL

1. How does Merlin want to fight back against the enemy? Why does Ransom forbid it? What does Ransom ask Merlin to do instead?
2. What is the experiment of “objectivity” Frost is carrying out on Mark? What happens in the “objectivity room”?
3. Why does the Director conclude that Jane must become a Christian? Why does Mark refuse to profane the crucifix?
4. What happened in the Blue Room at the manor of St Anne’s?



ANALYSIS

1. What might Lewis be trying to say about the old forms of pre-Christian magic in his inclusion of Merlin as a sort of transitional figure from pagan to Christian Britain?
2. How does the conversion of Jane and the defiance of Mark mirror one another? What do we learn about their spiritual journeys, and their different paths toward God?
3. How is the technological power of Belbury contrasted in these chapters with the creational imperative to be fruitful and multiply?



DIVING DEEPER

Mark was well aware of the rising danger. Obviously, if he disobeyed, his last chance of getting out of Belbury alive might be gone. Even of getting out of this room. The smothering sensation once again attacked him. He was himself, he felt, as helpless as the wooden Christ. As he thought this, he found himself looking at the crucifix in a new way—neither as a piece of wood nor a monument of superstition but as a bit of history. Christianity was nonsense, but one did not doubt that the man had lived and had been executed thus by the Belbury of those days. And that, as he suddenly saw, explained why this image, though not itself an image of the Straight or Normal, was yet in opposition to crooked Belbury. It was a picture of what happened when the Straight met the Crooked, a picture of what the Crooked did to the Straight what it would do to him if he remained straight. It was, in a more emphatic sense than he had yet understood, a cross.

-Ch 15, p. 333



REFLECTION

1. How might Mark's discovery of "the Normal" provide an antidote against spiritual warfare?

Whether because he had already survived that attack, or because the imminence of death had drawn the tooth of his lifelong desire for the esoteric, or because he had (in a fashion) called very urgently for help, the built and painted perversity of this room had the effect of making him aware, as he had never been aware before, of this room's opposite. As the desert first teaches men to love water, or as absence first reveals affection, there rose up against this background of the sour and the crooked some kind of vision of the sweet and the straight. Something else—something he vaguely called the "Normal" apparently existed. He had never thought about it before. But there it was—solid, massive, with a shape of its own, almost like something you could touch, or eat, or fall in love with. It was all mixed up with Jane and fried eggs and soap and sunlight and the rooks cawing at Cure Hardy and the thought that, somewhere outside, daylight was going on at that moment. He was not thinking in moral terms at all; or else (what is much the same thing) he was having his first deeply moral experience. He was choosing a side: the Normal.

- ch. 14, p. 296-97

2. How does Jane's surrendering her desire for God to "take her seriously" allow speak to your own relationship to God and his will for your life?