

# Out of the Silent Planet

By

C. S. Lewis

## PART 2



### Chapter 13

THE WHOLE village was astir next morning before the sunlight - already visible on the harandra - had penetrated the forest. By the light of the cooking fires Ransom saw an incessant activity of hrossa. The females were pouring out steaming food from clumsy pots; Hnohra was directing the transportation of piles of spears to the boats; Hyoi, in the midst of a group of the most experienced hunters, was talking too rapidly and too technically for Ransom to follow; parties were arriving from the neighbouring villages; and the cubs, squealing with excitement, were running hither and thither among their elders.

He found that his own share in the hunt had been taken for granted. He was to be in Hyoi's boat, with Hyoi and Whin. The two hrossa would take it in

turns to paddle, while Ransom and the disengaged hross would be in the bows. He understood the hrossa well enough to know that they were making him the noblest offer in their power, and that Hyoi and Whin were each tormented by the fear lest he should be paddling when the hnakra appeared. A short time ago, in England, nothing would have seemed more impossible to Ransom than to accept the post of honour and danger in an attack upon an unknown but certainly deadly aquatic monster. Even more recently, when he had first fled from the sorns or when he had lain pitying himself in the forest by night, it would hardly have been in his power to do what he was intending to do today. For his intention was clear. Whatever happened, he must show that the human species also were hnau. He was only too well aware that such resolutions might look very different when the moment came, but he felt an unwonted assurance that somehow or other he would be able to go through with it. It was necessary, and the necessary was always possible. Perhaps, too, there was something in the air he now breathed, or in the society of the hrossa, which had begun to work a change in him.

The lake was just giving back the first rays of the sun when he found himself kneeling side by side with Whin, as he had been told to, in the bows of Hyoi's ship, with a little pile of throwing-spears between his knees and one in his right hand, stiffening his body against the motion as Hyoi paddled them out into their place. At least a hundred boats were taking part in the hunt. They were in three parties. The central, and far the smallest, was to work its way up the current by which Hyoi and Ransom had descended after their first meeting. Longer ships than he had yet seen, eight-paddled ships, were used for this. The habit of the hnakra was to float down the current whenever he could; meeting the ships, he would presumably dart out of it into the still water to left or right. Hence while the central party slowly beat up the current, the light ships, paddling far faster, would cruise at will up and down either side of it to receive the quarry as soon as he broke what

might be called his 'cover'. In this game numbers and intelligence were on the side of the hrossa; the hnakra had speed on his side, and also invisibility, for he could swim under water. He was nearly invulnerable except through his open mouth. If the two hunters in the bows of the boat he made for muffed their shots, this was usually the last of them and of their boat.

In the light skirmishing parties there were two things a brave hunter could aim at. He could keep well back and close to the long ships where the hnakra was most likely to break out, or he could get as far forward as possible in the hope of meeting the hnakra going at its full speed and yet untroubled by the hunt, and of inducing it, by a well-aimed spear, to leave the current then and there. One could thus anticipate the beaters and kill the beast - if that was how the matter ended on one's own. This was the desire of Hyoui and Whin; and almost - so strongly they infected him - of Ransom. Hence, hardly had the heavy craft of the beaters begun their slow progress up-current amid a wall of foam when he found his own ship speeding northward as fast as Hyoui could drive her, already passing boat after boat and making for the freest water. The speed was exhilarating. In the cold morning the warmth of the blue expanse they were clearing was not unpleasant. Behind them arose, re-echoed from the remote rock pinnacles on either side of the valley, the bell-like, deep-mouthed voices of more than two hundred hrossa, more musical than a cry of hounds but closely akin to it in quality as in purport. Something long sleeping in the blood awoke in Ransom. It did not seem impossible at this moment that even he might be the hnakra-slayer; that the fame of Hman hnakrapunt might be handed down to posterity in this world that knew no other man. But he had had such dreams before, and knew how they ended. Imposing humility on the newly risen riot of his feelings, he turned his eyes to the troubled water of the current which they were skirting, without entering, and watched intently.

For a long time nothing happened. He became conscious of the stiffness of his attitude and deliberately relaxed his muscles. Presently Whin reluctantly went aft to paddle, and Hyoui came forward to take his place. Almost as soon as the change had been affected, Hyoui spoke softly to him and said, without taking his eyes off the current:

'There is an eldil coming to us over the water.'

Ransom could see nothing - or nothing that he could distinguish from imagination and the dance of sunlight on the lake. A moment later Hyoui spoke again, but not to him.

'What is it, sky-born?'

What happened next was the most uncanny experience Ransom had yet had on Malacandra. He heard the voice. It seemed to come out of the air, about a yard above his head, and it was almost an octave higher than the hross's - higher even than his own. He realized that a very little difference in his ear would have made the eldil as in-audible to him as it was invisible.

'It is the Man with you, Hyoui,' said the voice. 'He ought not to be there. He ought to be going to Oyarsa. Bent hnau of his own kind from Thulcandra are following him; he should go to Oyarsa. If they find him anywhere else there will be evil.'

'He hears you, sky-born,' said Hyoui. 'And have you no message for my wife? You know what she wishes to be told.'

'I have a message for Hleri,' said the eldil. 'But you will not be able to take it. I go to her now myself. All that is well. Only - let the Man go to Oyarsa.' There was a moment's silence.

'He is gone,' said Whin. 'And we have lost our share in the hunt.'

'Yes,' said Hyoui with a sigh. 'We must put Hman ashore and teach him the way to Meldilorn.'

Ransom was not so sure of his courage but that one part of him felt an instant relief at the idea of any diversion from their present business. But the other part of him urged him to hold on to his new-found manhood; now or never - with such companions or with none - he must leave a deed on his memory instead of one more broken dream. It was in obedience to something like conscience that lie exclaimed:

'No, no. There is time for that after the hunt. We must kill the hnakra first.'

'Once an eldil has spoken,' began Hyoui, when suddenly Whin gave a great cry (a 'bark' Ransom would have called it three weeks ago) and pointed. There, not a furlong away, was the torpedo-like track of foam; and now, visible through a wall of foam, they caught the metallic glint of the monster's sides. Whin was paddling furiously. Hyoui threw and missed. As his first spear smote the water his second was already in the air. This time it must have touched the hnakra. He wheeled right out of the current. Ransom saw the great black pit of his mouth twice open and twice shut with its snap of shark-like teeth. He himself had thrown now - hurriedly, excitedly, with unpractised hand.

'Back,' shouted Hyoui to Whin who was already backing water with every pound of his vast strength. Then all became confused. He heard Whin shout 'Shore!' There came a shock that flung him forward almost into the hnakra's jaws and he found himself at the same moment up to his waist in water. It was at him the teeth were snapping. Then as he flung shaft after shaft into the great cavern of the gaping brute he saw Hyoui perched incredibly on its back on its nose - bending forward and hurling from there. Almost at once the hross was dislodged and fell with a wide splash nearly ten yards away. But the hnakra was killed. It was wallowing on its side, bubbling out its black life. The water around him was dark and stank.

When he recollected himself they were all on shore, wet, steaming, trembling with exertion and embracing one another. It did not now seem strange to him to be clasped to a breast of wet fur. The breath of the hrossa, which, though sweet, was not human breath, did not offend him. He was one with them. That difficulty which they, accustomed to more than one rational species, had perhaps never felt, was now overcome. They were all hnau. They had stood shoulder to shoulder in the face of an enemy, and the shapes of their heads no longer mattered. And he, even Ransom, had come through it and not been disgraced. He had grown up.

They were on a little promontory free of forest, on which they had run aground in the confusion of the fight. The wreckage of the boat and the corpse of the monster lay confused together in the water beside them. No sound from the rest of the hunting party was audible; they had been almost a mile ahead when they met the hnakra. All three sat down to recover their breath.

'So,' said Hyoui, 'we are hnakrapunti. This is what I have wanted all my life.'

At that moment Ransom was deafened by a loud sound a perfectly familiar sound which was the last thing he expected to hear. It was a terrestrial, human and civilized sound; it was even European. It was the crack of an English rifle; and Hyoui, at his feet, was struggling to rise and gasping. There was blood on the white weed where he struggled. Ransom dropped on his knees beside him. The huge body of the hross was too heavy for him to turn round. Whin helped him.

'Hyoui, can you hear me?' said Ransom with his face close to the round seal-like head. 'Hyoui, it is through me that this has happened. It is the other Amana who have hit you, the bent two that brought me to Malacandra. They can throw death at a distance with a thing they have made. I should have told you. We are all a bent race. We have come here to bring evil on

Malacandra. We are only half hnau - Hyoui...' His speech died away into the inarticulate. He did not know the words for 'forgive', or 'shame, or 'fault', hardly the word for 'sorry'. He could only stare into Hyoui's distorted face in speechless guilt. But the hross seemed to understand. It was trying to say something, and Ransom laid his ear close to the working mouth. Hyoui's dulling eyes were fixed on his own, but the expression of a hross was not even now perfectly intelligible to him.

'Hna - hma;' it muttered and then, at last, 'Hman hnakrapunt.' Then there came a contortion of the whole body, a gush of blood and saliva from the mouth; his arms gave way under the sudden dead weight of the sagging head, and Hyoui's face became as alien and animal as it had seemed at their first meeting. The glazed eyes and the slowly stiffening, bedraggled fur, were like those of any dead beast found in an earthly wood.

Ransom resisted an infantile impulse to break out into imprecations on Weston and Devine. Instead he raised his eyes to meet those of Whin who was crouching - hrossa do not kneel - on the other side of the corpse.

'I am in the hands of your people, Whin,' he said. 'They must do as they will. But if they are wise they will kill me and certainly they will kill the other two.'

'One does not kill hnau,' said Whin. 'Only Oyarsa does that. But these other, where are they?'

Ransom glanced around. It was open on the promontory but thick wood came down to where it joined the mainland, perhaps two hundred yards away. 'Somewhere in the wood,' he said. 'Lie down, Whin, here where the ground is lowest. They may throw from their thing again.'

He had some difficulty in making Whin do as he suggested. When both were lying in dead ground, their feet almost in the water, the hross spoke again.

'Why did they kill him?' he asked.

'They would not know he was hnau,' said Ransom. 'I have told you that there is only one kind of hnau in our world. They would think he was a beast. If they thought that, they would kill him for pleasure, or in fear, or' (he hesitated) 'because they were hungry. But I must tell you the truth, Whin. They would kill even a hnau, knowing it to be hnau, if they thought its death would serve them.' There was a short silence.

'I am wondering,' said Ransom, 'if they saw me. It is for me they are looking. Perhaps if I went to them they would be content and come no farther into your land. But why do they not come out of the wood to see what they have killed?'

'Our people are coming,' said Whin, turning his head. Ransom looked back and saw the lake black with boats.

The main body of the hunt would be with them in a few minutes.

'They are afraid of the hrossa,' said Ransom. 'That is why they do not come out of the wood. I will go to them, Whin.'

'No,' said Whin. 'I have been thinking. All this has come from not obeying the eldil. He said you were to go to Oyarsa. You ought to have been already on the road. You must go now.'

'But that will leave the bent hmana here. They may do more harm.'

'They will not set on the hrossa. You have said they are afraid. It is more likely that we will come upon them. Never fear - they will not see us or hear us. We will take them to Oyarsa. But you must go now, as the eldil said.'

'Your people will think I have run away because I am afraid to look in their faces after Hyoui's death.'

'It is not a question of thinking but of what an eldil says. This is cubs' talk. Now listen, and I will teach you the way.

The hross explained to him that five days' journey to the south the handramit joined another handramit; and three days up this other handramil to west and north was Meldilorn and the seat of Oyarsa. But there was a shorter way, a mountain road, across the corner of the harandra between the two canyons, which would bring him down to Meldilorn on the second day. He must go into the wood before them and through it till he came to the mountain wall of the handramit; and he must work south along the roots of the mountains till he came to a road cut up between them. Up this he must go, and somewhere beyond the tops of the mountains he would come to the tower of Augray. Augray would help him. He could cut weed for his food before he left the forest and came into the rock country. Whin realized that Ransom might meet the other two hmana as soon as he entered the wood.

'If they catch you,' he said, then it will be as you say, they will come no farther into our land. But it is better to be taken on your way to Oyarsa than to stay here. And once you are on the way to him, I do not think he will let the bent ones stop you.'

Ransom was by no means convinced that this was the best plan either for himself or for the hrossa. But the stupor of humiliation in which he had lain ever since Hyoui fell forbade him to criticize. He was anxious only to do whatever they wanted him to do, to trouble them as little as was now possible, and above all to get away. It was impossible to find out how Whin felt; and Ransom sternly repressed an insistent, whining impulse to renewed protestations and regrets, self-accusations that might elicit some word of pardon. Hyoui with his last breath had called him hnakra-slayer; that was forgiveness generous enough and with that he must be content. As

soon as he had mastered the details of his route he bade farewell to Whin and advanced alone towards the forest.

## Chapter 14

UNTIL HE reached the wood Ransom found it difficult to think of anything except the possibility of another rifle bullet from Weston or Devine. He thought that they probably still wanted him alive rather than dead, and this, combined with the knowledge that a hross was watching him, enabled him to proceed with at least external composure. Even when he had entered the forest he felt himself in considerable danger. The long branchless stems made cover, only if you were very far away from the enemy; and the enemy in this case might be very close. He became aware of a strong impulse to shout out to Weston and Devine and give himself up; it rationalized itself in the form that this would remove them from the district, as they would probably take him off to the sorns and leave the hrossa unmolested. But Ransom knew a little psychology and had heard of the hunted man's irrational instinct to give himself up - indeed, he had felt it himself in dreams. It was some such trick, he thought, that his nerves were now playing him. In any case he was determined henceforward to obey the hrossa or eldila. His efforts to rely on his own judgement in Malacandra had so far ended tragically enough. He made a strong resolution, defying in advance all changes of mood, that he would faithfully carry out the journey to Meldilorn if it could be done.

This resolution seemed to him all the more certainly right because he had the deepest misgivings about that journey. He understood that the harandra, which he had to cross, was the home of the sorns. In fact he was walking of his own free will into the very trap that he had been trying to avoid ever since his arrival on Malacandra. (Here the first change of mood

tried to raise its head. He thrust it down.) And even if he got through the sorns and reached Meldilorn, who or what might Oyarsa be? Oyarsa, Whin had ominously observed, did not share the hrossa's objection to shedding the blood of a hnau. And again, Oyarsa ruled sorns as well as hrossa and pfiltriggi. Perhaps he was simply the arch-sorn. And now came the second change of mood. Those old terrestrial fears of some alien, cold, intelligence, superhuman in power, sub-human in cruelty, which had utterly faded from his mind among the hrossa, rose clamouring for readmission. But he strode on. He was going to Meldilorn. It was not possible, he told himself that the hrossa should obey any evil or monstrous creature; and they had told him - or had they? he was not quite sure - that Oyarsa was not a sorn. Was Oyarsa a god? - perhaps that very idol to whom the sorns wanted to sacrifice him. But the hrossa, though they said strange things about him, clearly denied that he was a god. There was one God, according to them, Maleldil the Young; nor was it possible to imagine Hyoui or Hnohra worshipping a bloodstained idol. Unless, of course, the hrossa were after all under the thumb of the sorns, superior to their masters in all the qualities that human beings value, but intellectually inferior to them and dependent on them. It would be a strange but not an inconceivable world; heroism and poetry at the bottom, cold scientific intellect above it, and overtopping all, some dark superstition which scientific intellect, helpless against the revenge of the emotional depths it had ignored, had neither will nor power to remove. A mumbo-jumbo... but Ransom pulled himself up. He knew too much now to talk that way. He and all his class would have called the eldila a superstition if they had been merely described to them, but now he had heard the voice himself No, Oyarsa was a real person if he was a person at all.

He had now been walking for about an hour, and it was nearly midday. No difficulty about his direction had yet occurred; he had merely to keep going uphill and he was certain of coming out of the forest to the mountain wall

sooner or later. Meanwhile he felt remarkably well, though greatly chastened in mind. The silent, purple half-light of the woods spread all around him as it had spread on the first day he spent in Malacandra, but everything else was changed. He looked back on that time as on a nightmare, on his own mood at that time as a sort of sickness. Then all had been whimpering, unanalyzed, self-nourishing, self-consuming dismay. Now, in the clear light of an accepted duty, he felt fear indeed, but with it a sober sense of confidence in himself and in the world, and even an element of pleasure. It was the difference between a landsman in a sinking ship and a horseman on a bolting horse: either may be killed, but the horseman is an agent as well as a patient.

About an hour after noon he suddenly came out of the wood into bright sunshine. He was only twenty yards from the almost perpendicular bases of the mountain spires, too close to them to see their tops. A sort of valley ran up in the re-entrant between two of them at the place where he had emerged: an unclimbable valley consisting of a single concave sweep of stone, which in its lower parts ascended steeply as the roof of a house and farther up seemed almost vertical. At the top it even looked as if it hung over a bit, like a tidal wave of stone at the very moment of breaking; but this, he thought, might be an illusion. He wondered what the hrossa's idea of a road might be.

He began to work his way southward along the narrow, broken ground between wood and mountain. Great spurs of the mountains had to be crossed every few moments, and even in that lightweight world it was intensely tiring. After about half an hour he came to a stream. Here he went a few paces into the forest, cut himself an ample supply of the ground weed, and sat down beside the water's edge for lunch. When he had finished he filled his pockets with what he had not eaten and proceeded.

He began soon to be anxious about his road, for if he could make the top at all he could do it only by daylight and the middle of the afternoon was approaching. But his fears were unnecessary. When it came it was unmistakable. An open way through the wood appeared on the left - he must be somewhere behind the hross village now - and on the right he saw the road, a single ledge, or in places, a trench, cut sidewise and upwards across the sweep of such a valley as he had seen before. It took his breath away - the insanely steep, hideously narrow stair-case without steps, leading up and up from where he stood to where it was an almost invisible thread on the pale green surface of the rock. But there was no time to stand and look at it. He was a poor judge of heights, but he had no doubt that the top of the road was removed from him by a more than Alpine distance. It would take him at least till sundown to reach it. Instantly he began the ascent.

Such a journey would have been impossible on earth; the first quarter of an hour would have reduced a man of Ransom's build and age to exhaustion.

Here he was at first delighted with the ease of his movement, and then staggered by the gradient and length of the climb which, even under Malacandrian conditions, soon bowed his back and gave him an aching chest and trembling knees. But this was not the worst. He heard already a singing in his ears, and noticed that despite his labour there was no sweat on his forehead. The cold, increasing at every step, seemed to sap his vitality worse than any heat could have done. Already his lips were cracked; his breath, as he panted, showed like a cloud; his fingers were numb. He was cutting his way up into a silent arctic world, and had already passed from an English to a Lapland winter. It frightened him, and he decided that he must rest here or not at all; a hundred paces more and if he sat down he would sit for ever. He squatted on the road for a few minutes, slapping

his body with his arms. The landscape was terrifying. Already the handramit which had made his world for so many weeks was only a thin purple cleft sunk amidst the boundless level desolation of the harandra which now, on the farther side, showed clearly between and above the mountain peaks. But long before he was rested he knew that he must go on or die.

The world grew stranger. Among the hrossa he had almost lost the feeling of being on a strange planet; here it returned upon him with desolating force. It was no longer 'the world', scarcely even a world': it was a planet, a star, a waste place in the universe, millions of miles from the world of men. It was impossible to recall what he had felt about Hyoi, or Whin, or the eldila, or Oyarsa. It seemed fantastic to have thought he had duties to such hobgoblins - if they were not hallucinations - met in the wilds of space. He had nothing to do with them: he was a man. Why had Weston and Devine left him alone like this?

But all the time the old resolution, taken when he could still think, was driving him up the road. Often he forgot where he was going, and why. The movement became a mechanical rhythm from weariness to stillness, from stillness to unbearable cold, from cold to motion again. He noticed that the handramit - now an insignificant part of the landscape - was full of a sort of haze. He had never seen a fog while he was living there. Perhaps that was what the air of the handramit looked like from above; certainly it was different air from this. There was something more wrong with his lungs and heart than even the cold and the exertion accounted for. And though there was no snow, there was an extraordinary brightness. The light was increasing, sharpening and growing whiter and the sky was a much darker blue than he had ever seen on Malacandra. indeed, it was darker than blue; it was almost black, and the jagged spines of rock standing against it were like his mental picture of a lunar landscape. Some stars were visible.

Suddenly he realized the meaning of these phenomena. There was very little air above him: he was near the end of it. The Malacandrian atmosphere lay chiefly in the handramits; the real surface of the planet was naked or thinly clad. The stabbing sunlight and the black sky above him were that 'heaven' out of which he had dropped into the Malacandrian world, already showing through the last thin veil of air. If the top were more than a hundred feet away, it would be where no man could breathe at all. He wondered whether the hrossa had different lungs and had sent him by a road that meant death for man.

But even while he thought of this he took note that those jagged peaks blazing in sunlight against an almost black sky were level with him. He was no longer ascending. The road ran on before him in a kind of shallow ravine bounded on his left by the tops of the highest rock pinnacles and on his right by a smooth ascending swell of stone that ran up to the true harandra. And where he was, he could still breathe, though gasping, dizzy and in pain. The blaze in his eyes was worse. The sun was setting. The hrossa must have foreseen this; they could not live, any more than he, on the harandra by night. Still staggering forward, he looked about him for any sign of Augray's tower, whatever Augray might be.

Doubtless he exaggerated the time during which he thus wandered and watched the shadows from the rocks lengthening towards him. It cannot really have been long before he saw a light ahead - a light which showed how dark the surrounding landscape had become. He tried to run but his body would not respond. Stumbling in haste and weakness, he made for the light; thought he had reached it and found that it was far farther off than he had supposed; almost despaired; staggered on again, and came at last to what seemed a cavern mouth. The light within was an unsteady one and a delicious wave of warmth smote on his face. It was firelight. He came into the mouth of the cave and then, unsteadily, round the fire and into the

interior, and stood still blinking in the light. When at last he could see, he discerned a smooth chamber of green rock, very lofty. There were two things in it. One of them, dancing on the wall and roof, was the huge, angular shadow of a sorn: the other, crouched beneath it, was the sorn himself.

## Chapter 15

'COME IN, Small One,' boomed the sorn. 'Come in and let me look at you.'

Now that he stood face to face with the spectre that had haunted him ever since he set foot on Malacandra, Ransom felt a surprising indifference. He had no idea what might be coming next, but he was determined to carry out his programme; and in the meantime the warmth and more breathable air were a heaven in themselves. He came in, well in past the fire, and answered the sorn. His own voice sounded to him a shrill treble.

The hrossa have sent me to look for Oyarsa,' he said. The sorn peered at him. 'You are not from this world,' it said suddenly.

'No,' replied Ransom, and sat down. He was too tired to explain.

'I think you are from Thulcandra, Small One,' said the sorn.

'Why?' said Ransom.

'You are small and thick and that is how the animals ought to be made in a heavier world. You cannot come from Glundandra, for it is so heavy that if any animals could live there, they would be flat like plates - even you, Small one, would break if you stood up on that world. I do not think you are from Perelandra, for it must be very hot; if any came from there they would not live when they arrived here. So I conclude you are from Thulcandra.'

'The world I come from is called Earth by those who live there,' said Ransom. 'And it is much warmer than this. Before I came into your cave I was nearly dead with cold and thin air.'

The sorn made a sudden movement with one of its long fore-limbs. Ransom stiffened (though he did not allow himself to retreat), for the creature might be going to grab him. In fact, its intentions were kindly. Stretching back into the cave, it took from the wall what looked like a cup. Then Ransom saw that it was attached to a length of flexible tube. The sorn put it into his hands.

'Smell on this,' it said. 'The hrossa also need it when they pass this way.'

Ransom inhaled and was instantly refreshed. His painful shortness of breath was eased and the tension of chest and temples was relaxed. The sorn and the lighted cavern, hitherto vague and dream-like to his eyes, took on a new reality.

'Oxygen?' he asked; but naturally the English word meant nothing to the sorn.

'Are you called Augray?' he asked.

'Yes,' said the sorn. 'What are you called?'

'The animal I am is called Man, and therefore the hrossa call me Hman. But my own name is Ransom.'

'Man Ren-soom,' said the sorn. He noticed that it spoke differently from the hrossa, without any suggestion of their persistent initial H.

It was sitting on its long, wedge-shaped buttocks with its feet drawn close up to it. A man in the same posture would have rested his chin on his knees, but the sorn's legs were too long for that. Its knees rose high above its shoulders on each side of its head - grotesquely suggestive of huge ears - and the head, down between them, rested its chin on the protruding

breast. The creature seemed to have either a double chin or a beard; Ransom could not make out which in the firelight. It was mainly white or cream in colour and seemed to be clothed down to the ankles in some soft substance that reflected the light. On the long fragile shanks, where the creature was closest to him, he saw that this was some natural kind of coat. It was not like fur but more like feathers. In fact it was almost exactly like feathers. The whole animal, seen at close quarters, was less terrifying than he had expected, and even a little smaller. The face, it was true, took a good deal of getting used to - it was too long, too solemn and too colourless, and it was much more unpleasantly like a human face than any inhuman creature's face ought to be. Its eyes, like those of all very large creatures, seemed too small for it. But it was more grotesque than horrible. A new conception of the sorns began to arise in his mind: the ideas of 'giant' and 'ghost' receded behind those of 'goblin' and 'gawk'.

'Perhaps you are hungry, Small One,' it said.

Ransom was. The sorn rose with strange spidery movements and began going to and fro about the cave, attended by its thin goblin shadow. It brought him the usual vegetable foods of Malacandra, and strong drink, with the very welcome addition of a smooth brown substance which revealed itself to nose, eye and palate, in defiance of all probability, as cheese. Ransom asked what it was.

The sorn began to explain painfully how the female of some animals secreted a fluid for the nourishment of its young, and would have gone on to describe the whole process of milking and cheesemaking, if Ransom had not interrupted it.

'Yes, yes,' he said. 'We do the same on Earth. What is the beast you use?'

'It is a yellow beast with a long neck. It feeds on the forests that grow in the handramit. The young ones of our people who are not yet fit for much else

drive the beasts down there in the mornings and follow them while they feed; then before night they drive them back and put them in the caves.'

For a moment Ransom found something reassuring in the thought that the sorns were shepherds. Then he remembered that the Cyclops in Homer plied the same trade.

'I think I have seen one of your people at this very work,' he said. 'But the hrossa - they let you tear up their forests?'

'Why should they not?'

'Do you rule the hrossa?'

'Oyarsa rules them.'

'And who rules you?'

'Oyarsa.'

'But you know more than the hrossa?'

'The hrossa know nothing except about poems and fish and making things grow out of the ground.'

'And Oyarsa - is he a sorn?'

'No, no, Small One. I have told you he rules all nau' (so he pronounced hnau) 'and everything in Malacandra.'

'I do not understand this Oyarsa,' said Ransom. 'Tell me more.'

'Oyarsa does not die,' said the sorn 'And he does not breed. He is the one of his kind who was put into Malacandra to rule it when Malacandra was made. His body is not like ours, nor yours; it is hard to see and the light goes through it.'

'Like an eldil?'

'Yes, he is the greatest of eldila who ever come to a handra.'

'What are these eldila?'

'Do you tell me, Small One, that there are no eldila in your world?'

'Not that I know of. But what are eldila, and why can I not see them? Have they no bodies?'

'Of course they have bodies. There are a great many bodies you cannot see. Every animal's eyes see some things but not others. Do you not know of many kinds of body in Thulcandra?'

Ransom tried to give the sorn some idea of the terrestrial terminology of solids, liquids and gases. It listened with great attention.

'That is not the way to say it,' it replied. 'Body is movement. If it is at one speed, you smell something; if at another, you hear a sound; if at another, you see a sight; if at another, you neither see nor hear nor smell nor know the body in any way. But mark this, Small One, that the two ends meet.'

'How do you mean?'

'If movement is faster, then that which moves is more, nearly in two places at once.'

'That is true.'

'But if the movement were faster still - it is difficult, for you do not know many words - you see that if you made it faster and faster, in the end the moving thing would be in all places at once, Small One.'

'I think see that.'

'Well, then, that is the thing at the top of all bodies - so fast that it is at rest, so truly body that it has ceased being body at all. But we will not talk of that. Start from where we are, Small One. The swiftest thing that touches our senses is light. We do not truly see light, we only see slower things lit by it, so that for us light is on the edge - the last thing we know before things

become too swift for us. But the body of an eldil is a movement swift as light; you may say its body is made of light, but not of that which is light for the eldil. His 'light' is a swifter movement which for us is nothing at all; and what we call light is for him a thing like water, a visible thing, a thing he can touch and bathe in - even a dark thing when not illumined by the swifter. And what we call firm things - flesh and earth - seems to him thinner, and harder to see, than our light, and more like clouds, and nearly nothing. To us the eldil is a thin, half-real body that can go through walls and rocks; to himself he goes through them because he is solid and firm and they are like cloud. And what is true light to him and fills the heaven, so that he will plunge into the rays of the sun to refresh himself from it, is to us the black nothing in the sky at night. These things are not strange, Small One, though they are beyond our senses. But it is strange that the eldila never visit Thulcandra.'

'Of that I am not certain,' said Ransom. It had dawned on him that the recurrent human tradition of bright, elusive people sometimes appearing on the Earth - alns, devas and the like - might after all have another explanation than the anthropologists had yet given. True, it would turn the universe rather oddly inside out; but his experiences in the space-ship had prepared him for some such operation.

'Why does Oyarsa send for me?' he asked.

'Oyarsa has not told me,' said the sorn. 'But doubtless he would want to see any stranger from another handra.'

'We have no Oyarsa in my world,' said Ransom.

'That is another proof,' said the sorn, 'that you come from Thulcandra, the silent planet.'

'What has that to do with it?'

The sorn seemed surprised. 'It is not very likely if you had an Oyarsa that he would never speak to ours.'

'Speak to yours? But how could he - it is millions of miles away.'

'Oyarsa would not think of it like that.'

'Do you mean that he ordinarily receives messages from other planets?'

'Once again, he would not say it that way. Oyarsa would not say that he lives on Malacandra and that another Oyarsa lives on another earth. For him Malacandra is only a place in the heavens; it is in the heavens that he and the others live. Of course they talk together....'

Ransom's mind shied away from the problem; he was getting sleepy and thought he must be misunderstanding the sorn.

'I think I must sleep, Augray,' he said. 'And I do not know what you are saying. Perhaps, too, I do not come from what you call Thulcandra.'

'We will both sleep presently,' said the sorn. 'But first I will show you Thulcandra.'

It rose and Ransom followed it into the back of the cave. Here he found a little recess and running up within it a winding stair. The steps, hewn for sorns, were too high for a man to climb with any comfort, but using hands and knees he managed to hobble up. The sorn preceded him. Ransom did not understand the light, which seemed to come from some small round object which the creature held in its hand. They went up a long way, almost as if they were climbing up the inside of a hollow mountain. At last, breathless, he found himself in a dark but warm chamber of rock, and heard the sorn saying:

'She is still well above the southern horizon.' It directed his attention to something like a small window. Whatever it was, it did not appear to work like an earthly telescope, Ransom thought; though an attempt, made next

day, to explain the principles of the telescope to the sorn threw grave doubts on his own ability to discern the difference. He leaned forward with his elbows on the sill of the aperture and looked. He saw perfect blackness and, floating in the centre of it, seemingly an arm's length away, a bright disk about the size of a half-crown. Most of its surface was featureless, shining silver'; towards the bottom markings appeared, and below them a white cap, just as he had seen the polar caps in astronomical photographs of Mars. He wondered for a moment if it was Mars he was looking at; then, as his eyes took in the markings better, he recognized what they were Northern Europe and a piece of North America. They were upside down with the North Pole at the bottom of the picture and this somehow shocked him. But it was Earth he was seeing - even, perhaps, England, though the picture shook a little and his eyes were quickly getting tired, and he could not be certain that he was not imagining it. It was all there in that little disk - London, Athens, Jerusalem, Shakespeare. There everyone had lived and everything had happened; and there, presumably, his pack was still lying in the porch of an empty house near Sterk.

'Yes,' he said dully to the sorn. 'That is my world: It was the bleakest moment in all his travels.'

## Chapter 16

RANSOM AWOKE next morning with the vague feeling that a great weight had been taken off his mind. Then he; remembered that he was the guest of a sorn and that the creature he had been avoiding ever since he landed had turned out to be as amicable as the hrossa, though he was far from feeling the same affection for it. Nothing remained to be afraid of in Malacandra except Oyarsa... 'The last fence', thought Ransom. Augray gave him food and drink.

'And now,' said Ransom, 'how shall I find my way to Oyarsa?'

'I will carry you,' said the sorn. 'You are too small a one to make the journey yourself and I will gladly go to Meldilorn. The hrossa should not have sent you this way. They do not seem to know from looking at an animal what sort of lungs it has and what it can do. It is just like a hross. If you died on the harandra they would have made a poem about the gallant hman and how the sky grew black and the cold stars shone and he journeyed on and journeyed on; and they would have put in a fine speech for you to say as you were dying ... and all this would seem to them just as good as if they had used a little forethought and saved your life by sending you the easier way round.'

'I like the hrossa,' said Ransom a little stiffly. 'And I think the way they talk about death is the right way.'

'They are right not to fear it, Ren-soom, but they do not seem to look at it reasonably as part of the very nature of our bodies - and therefore often avoidable at times when they would never see how to avoid it. For example, this has saved the life of many a hross, but a hross would not have thought of it.'

He showed Ransom a flask with a tube attached to it, and, at the end of the tube, a cup, obviously an apparatus for administering oxygen to oneself.

'Smell on it as you have need, Small One,' said the sorn. 'And close it up when you do not.'

Augray fastened the thing on his back and gave the tube over his shoulder into his hand. Ransom could not restrain a shudder at the touch of the sorn's hands upon his body; they were fan-shaped, seven-fingered, mere skin over bone like a bird's leg, and quite cold. To divert his mind from such reactions he asked where the apparatus was made, for he had as yet seen nothing remotely like a factory or a laboratory.

'We thought it,' said the sorn, 'and the 'pfiltriggi' made it.

'Why do they make them?' said Ransom. He was trying once more, with his insufficient vocabulary, to find out the political and economic framework of Malacandrian life.

'They like making things,' said Augray. 'It is true they like best the making of things that are only good to look at and of no use. But sometimes when they are tired of that they will make things for us, things we have thought, provided they are difficult enough. They have not patience to make easy things however useful they would be. But let us begin our journey. You shall sit on my shoulder.'

The proposal was unexpected and alarming, but seeing that the sorn had already crouched down, Ransom felt obliged to climb on to the plume-like surface of its shoulder, to seat himself beside the long, pale face, casting his right arm as far as it would go round the huge neck, and to compose himself as well as he could for this precarious mode of travel. The giant rose cautiously to a standing position and he found himself looking down on the landscape from a height of about eighteen feet.

'Is all well, Small One?' it asked.

'Very well,' Ransom answered, and the journey began. Its gait was perhaps the least human thing about it. It lifted its feet very high and set them down very gently. Ransom was reminded alternately of a cat stalking, a strutting barn-door fowl, and a high-stepping carriage horse; but the movement was not really like that of any terrestrial animal. For the passenger it was surprisingly comfortable. In a few minutes he had lost all sense of what was dizzying or unnatural in his position. Instead, ludicrous and even tender associations came crowding into his mind. It was like riding an elephant at the zoo in boyhood - like riding on his father's back at a still earlier age. It was fun. They seemed to be doing between six and seven miles an hour.

The cold, though severe, was endurable; and thanks to the oxygen he had little difficulty with his breathing.

The landscape which he saw from his high, swaying post of observation was a solemn one. The handramit was nowhere to be seen. On each side of the shallow gully in which they were walking, a world of naked, faintly greenish rock, interrupted with wide patches of red, extended to the horizon. The heaven, darkest blue where the rock met it, was almost black at the zenith, and looking in any direction where sunlight did not blind him, he could see the stars. He learned from the sorn that he was right in thinking they were near the limits of the breathable. Already on the mountain fringe that borders the harandra and, walls the handramit, or in the narrow depression along which their road led them, the air is of Himalayan rarity, ill breathing for a hross, and a few hundred feet higher, on the harandra proper, the true surface of the planet, it admits no life. Hence the brightness through which they walked was almost that of heaven - celestial light hardly at all tempered with an atmospheric veil.

The shadow of the sorn, with Ransom's shadow on its shoulder, moved over the uneven rock unnaturally distinct like 'the shadow of a tree before the headlights of a car; and the rock beyond the shadow hurt his eyes. The remote horizon seemed but an arm's length away. The fissures and moulding of distant slopes were clear as the background of a primitive picture made before men learned perspective. He was on the very frontier of that heaven he had known in the space-ship, and rays that the air enveloped words cannot taste were once more at work upon his body. He felt the old lift of the heart, the soaring solemnity, the sense, at once sober and ecstatic, of life and power offered in unasked and unmeasured abundance. If there had been air enough in his lungs he would have laughed aloud. And now, even in the immediate landscape, beauty was drawing near. Over the edge of the valley, as if it had frothed down from

the true harandra, came great curves of the rose-tinted stuff which he had seen so often from a distance. Now on a nearer view they appeared hard as stone in substance, but puffed above and stalked beneath like vegetation. His original simile of giant cauliflower turned out to be surprisingly correct - stone cauliflowers the size of cathedrals and the colour of pale rose. He asked the sorn what it was.

'It is the old forests of Malacandra,' said Augray. 'Once there was air on the harandra and it was warm. To this day, if you could get up there and live, you would see it all covered with the bones of ancient creatures; it was once full of life and noise. It was then these forests grew, and in and out among their stalks went a people that have vanished from the world these many thousand years. They were covered not with fur but with a coat like mine. They did not go in the water swimming or on the ground walking; they glided in the air on broad flat limbs which kept them up. It is said they were great singers, and in those days the red forests echoed with their music. Now the forests have become stone and only eldila can go among them.'

'We still have such creatures in our world,' said Ransom. 'We call them birds. Where was Oyarsa when all this happened to the harandra?' 'Where he is now.'

'And he could not prevent it?'

'I do not know. But a world is not made to last forever, much less a race; that is not Maleldil's way.'

As they proceeded the petrified forests grew more numerous, and often for half an hour at a time the whole horizon of the lifeless, almost airless, waste blushed like an English garden in summer. They passed many caves, where, as Augray told him, sorns lived; Sometimes a high cliff would be perforated with countless holes to the very top and unidentifiable noises came

hollowly from within. 'Work' was in progress, said the sorn, but of what kind it could not make him understand. Its vocabulary was very different from that of the hrossa. Nowhere did he see anything like a village or city of sorns. who were apparently solitary not social creatures. Once or twice a long pallid face would show from a cavern mouth and exchange a horn-like greeting with the travellers, but for the most part the long valley, the rock-street of the silent people, was still and empty as the harandra itself.

Only towards afternoon, as they were about to descend into a dip of the road, they met three sorns together coming towards them down the opposite slope. They seemed to Ransom to be rather skating than walking. The lightness of their world and the perfect poise of their bodies allowed them to lean forward at right angles to the slope, and they came swiftly down like full-rigged ships before a fair wind. The grace of their movement, their lofty stature, and the softened glancing of the sunlight on their feathery sides, effected a final transformation in Ransom's feelings towards their race. 'Ogres' he had called them when they first met his eyes as he struggled in the grip of Weston and Devine; 'Titans' or 'Angels' he now thought would have been a better word. Even the faces, it seemed to him, he had not then seen aright. He had thought them spectral when they were only august, and his first human reaction to their lengthened severity of line and profound stillness of expression now appeared to him not so much cowardly as vulgar. So might Parmenides or Confucius look to the eyes of a Cockney schoolboy! The great white creatures sailed towards Ransom and Augray and dipped like trees and passed.

In spite of the cold - which made him often dismount and take a spell on foot - he did not wish for the end of the journey; but Augray had his own plans and halted for the night long before sundown at the home of an older sorn. Ransom saw well enough that he was brought there to be shown to a great scientist. The cave, or, to speak more correctly, the system of

excavations, was large and many-chambered, and contained a multitude of things that he did not understand. He was especially interested in a collection of rolls, seemingly of skin, covered with characters, which were clearly books; but he gathered that books were few in Malacindra.

'It is better to remember,' said the sorns.

When Ransom asked if valuable secrets might not thus be lost, they replied that Oyarsa always remembered them and would bring them to light if he thought fit.

'The hrossa used to have many books of poetry,' they added. 'But now they have fewer. They say that the writing of books destroys poetry.'

Their host in these caverns was attended by a number of other sorns who seemed to be in some way subordinate to him; Ransom thought at first that they were servants but decided later that they were pupils or assistants.

The evening's conversation was not such as would interest a terrestrial reader, for the sorns had determined that Ransom should not ask, but answer, questions. Their questioning was very different from the rambling, imaginative inquiries of the hrossa. They worked systematically from the geology of Earth to its present geography, and thence in turn to flora, fauna, human history, languages, politics and arts. When they found that Ransom could tell them no more on a given subject - and this happened pretty soon in most of their inquiries - they dropped it at once and went on to the next. Often they drew out of him indirectly much more knowledge than he consciously possessed, apparently working from a wide background of general science. A casual remark about trees when Ransom was trying to explain the manufacture of paper would fill up for them a gap in his sketchy answers to their botanical questions; his account of terrestrial navigation might illuminate mineralogy; and his description of the steam engine gave them a better knowledge of terrestrial air and water than Ransom had ever

had. He had decided from the outset that he would be quite frank, for he now felt that it would be not hnau, and also that it would be unavailing, to do otherwise. They were astonished at what he had to tell them of human history of war, slavery and prostitution.

'It is because they have no Oyarsa,' said one of the pupils.

'It is because every one of them wants to be a little Oyarsa himself' said Augray.

'They cannot help it,' said the old sorn. 'There must be rule, yet how can creatures rule themselves? Beasts must be ruled by hnau and hnau by eldila and eldila by Maleldil. These creatures have no eldila. They are like one trying to lift himself by his own hair - or one trying to see over a whole country when he is on a level with it - like a female trying to beget young on herself.'

Two things about our world particularly stuck in their minds. One was the extraordinary degree to which problems of lifting and carrying things absorbed our energy. The other was the fact that we had only one kind of hnau: they thought this must have far-reaching effects in the narrowing of sympathies and even of thought.

'Your thought must be at the mercy of your blood,' said the old sorn. 'For you cannot compare it with thought that floats on a different blood.'

It was a tiring and very disagreeable conversation for Ransom. But when at last he lay down to sleep it was not of the human nakedness nor of his own ignorance that he was thinking. He thought only of the old forests of Malacindra and of what it might mean to grow up seeing always so few miles away a land of colour that could never be reached and had once been inhabited.

## Chapter 17

EARLY NEXT day Ransom again took his seat on Augray's shoulder. For more than an hour they travelled through the same bright wilderness. Far to the north the sky was luminous with a cloud-like mass of dull red or ochre; it was very large and drove furiously westward about ten miles above the waste. Ransom, who had yet seen no cloud in the Malacandrian sky, asked what it was. The sorn told him it was sand caught up from the great northern deserts by the winds of that terrible country. It was often thus carried, sometimes at a height of seventeen miles, to fall again, perhaps in a handramit, as a choking and blinding dust storm. The sight of it moving with menace in the naked sky served to remind Ransom that they were indeed on the outside of Malacandra - no longer dwelling in a world but crawling over the surface of a strange planet. At last the cloud seemed to drop and burst far on the western horizon, where a glow, not unlike that of a conflagration, remained visible until a turn of the valley hid all that region from his view.

The same turn opened a new prospect to his eyes. What lay before him looked at first strangely like an earthly landscape - a landscape of grey downland ridges rising and falling like waves of the sea. Far beyond, cliffs and spires of the familiar green rock rose against the dark blue sky. A moment later he saw that what he had taken for downlands was but the ridged and furrowed surface of a blue-grey valley mist - a mist which would not appear a mist at all when they descended into the handramit. And already, as their road began descending, it was less visible and the many-coloured pattern of the low country showed vaguely through it. The descent grew quickly steeper; like the jagged teeth of a giant:- a giant with very bad teeth - the topmost peaks of the mountain wall down which they must pass loomed up over the edge of their gully. The look of the sky and the quality of the light were infinitesimally changed. A moment later they

stood on the edge of such a slope as by earthly standards would rather be called a precipice; down and down this face, to where it vanished in a purple blush of vegetation, ran their road. Ransom refused absolutely to make the descent on Augray's shoulder. The sorn, though it did not fully understand his objection, stooped for him to dismount, and proceeded, with that same skating and forward sloping motion, to go down before him. Ransom followed, using gladly but stiffly his numb legs.

The beauty of this new handramit as it opened before him took his breath away. It was wider than that in which he had hitherto lived and right below him lay an almost circular lake - a sapphire twelve miles in diameter set in a border of purple forest. Amidst the lake there rose like a low and gently sloping pyramid, or like a woman's breast, an island of pale red, smooth to the summit, and on the summit, a grove of such trees as man had never seen. Their smooth columns had the gentle swell of the noblest beech trees: but these were taller than a cathedral spire on earth, and at their tops they broke rather into flower than foliage; into golden flower bright as tulip, still as rock, and huge as summer cloud. Flowers indeed they were, not trees, and far down among their roots he caught a pale hint of slab-like architecture. He knew before his guide told him that this was Meldilorn. He did not know what he had expected. The old dreams which he had brought from earth of some more than American complexity of offices or some engineers' paradise of vast machines had indeed been long laid aside. But he had not looked for anything quite so classic, so virginal, as this bright grove - lying so still, so secret, in its coloured valley, soaring with inimitable grace so many hundred feet into the wintry sunlight. At every step of his descent the comparative warmth of the valley came up to him more deliciously. He looked above - the sky was turning to a paler blue. He looked below - and sweet and faint the thin fragrance of the giant blooms came up to him. Distant crags were growing less sharp in outline, and surfaces less bright. Depth, dimness, softness and perspective were returning to the

landscape. The lip or edge of rock from which they had started their descent was already far overhead; it seemed unlikely that they had really come from there. He was breathing freely. His toes, so long benumbed, could move delightfully inside his boots. He lifted the ear-flaps of his cap and found his ears instantly filled with the sound of falling water. And now he was treading on soft ground weed over level earth and the forest roof was above his head. They had conquered the harandra and were on the threshold of Meldilorn.

A short walk brought them into a kind of forest 'ride' - a broad avenue running straight as an arrow through the purple stems to where the rigid blue of the lake danced at the end of it. There they found a gong and hammer hung on a pillar of stone. These objects were all richly decorated, and the gong and hammer were of a greenish-blue metal which Ransom did not recognize. Augray struck the gong. An excitement was rising in Ransom's mind which almost prevented him from examining as coolly as he wished the ornamentation of the stone. It was partly pictorial, partly pure decoration. What chiefly struck him was a certain balance of packed and empty surfaces. Pure line drawings, as bare as the prehistoric pictures of reindeer on Earth, alternated with patches of design as close and intricate as Norse or Celtic jewellery; and then, as you looked at it, these empty and crowded areas turned out to be themselves arranged in larger designs. He was struck by the fact that the pictorial work was not confined to the emptier spaces; quite often large arabesques included as a subordinate detail intricate picture. Elsewhere the opposite plan had been followed - and this alternation, too, had a rhythmical or patterned element in it. He was just beginning to find out that the pictures, though stylized, were obviously intended to tell a story, when Augray interrupted him. A ship had put out from the island shore of Meldilorn.

As it came towards them Ransom's heart warmed to see that it was paddled by a hross. The creature brought its boat up to the shore where they were waiting, stared at Ransom and then looked inquiringly at Augray.

'You may well wonder at this nau, Hrinha,' said the sorn, 'for you have never seen anything like it. It is called Ren-soom and has come through heaven from Thulcandra.'

'It is welcome, Augray,' said the hross politely. 'Is it coming to Oyarsa?'

'He has sent for it.'

'And for you also; Augray?'

'Oyarsa has not called me. If you will take Ren-soom over the water, I will go back to my tower.'

The hross indicated that Ransom should enter the boat. He attempted to express his thanks to the sorn and after a moment's consideration unstrapped his wrist watch and offered it to him;- it was the only thing he had which seemed a suitable present for a sorn. He had no difficulty in making Augray understand its purpose; but after examining it the giant gave it back to him, a little reluctantly, and said:

'This gift ought to be given to pftfltrigg. It rejoices my heart, but they would make more of it. You are likely to meet some of the busy people in Meldilorn: give it to them. As for its use, do your people not know except by looking at this thing how much of the day has worn?'

'I believe there are beasts that have a sort of knowledge of that,' said Ransom, 'but our hnau have lost it.'

After this, his farewells to the sorn were made and he embarked. To be once more in a boat and with a hross, to feel the warmth of water on his face and to see a blue sky above him, was almost like coming home. He took off his cap and leaned back luxuriously in the bows, plying his escort with

questions. He learned that the hrossa were not especially concerned with the service of Oyarsa, as he had surmised from finding a hross in charge of the ferry: all three species of hnau served him in their various capacities, and the ferry was naturally entrusted to those who understood boats. He learned that his own procedure on arriving in Meldilorn must be to go where he liked and do what he pleased until Oyarsa called for him. It might be an hour or several days before this happened. He would find huts near the landing place where he could sleep if necessary and where food would be given him. In return he related as much as he could make intelligible of his own world and his journey from it; and he warned the hross of the dangerous bent men who had brought him and who were still at large on Malacandra. As he did so, it occurred to him that he had not made this sufficiently clear to Augray; but he consoled himself with the reflection that Weston and Devine seemed to have already some liaison with the sorns and that they would not be likely to molest things so large and so comparatively man-like. At any rate, not yet. About Devine's ultimate designs he had no illusions; all he could do was to make a clean breast of them to Oyarsa. And now the ship touched land.

Ransom rose, while the hross was making fast, and looked about him. Close to the little harbour which they had entered, and to the left, were low buildings of stone - the first he had seen in Malacandra - and fires were burning. There, the hross told him, he could find food and shelter. For the rest the island seemed desolate, and its smooth slopes empty up to the grove that crowned them, where, again, he saw stonework. But this appeared to be neither temple nor house in the human sense, but a broad avenue of monoliths - a much larger Stonehenge, stately, empty and vanishing over the crest of the hill into the pale shadow of the flowertrunks. All was solitude; but as he gazed upon it he seemed to hear, against the background of morning silence; a faint, continual agitation of silvery sound - hardly a sound at all, if you attended to it, and yet impossible to ignore.

'The island is all full of eldila,' said the hross in a hushed voice.

He went ashore. As though half expecting some obstacle, he took a few hesitant paces forward and stopped, and then went on again in the same fashion.

Though the ground weed was unusually soft and rich and his feet made no noise upon it, he felt an impulse to walk on tiptoes. All his movements became gentle and sedate. The width of water about this island made the air warmer than any he had yet breathed in Malacandra; the climate was almost that of a warm earthly day in late September - a day that is warm but with a hint of frost to come. The sense of awe which was increasing upon him deterred him from approaching the crown of the hill, the grove and the avenue of standing stones.

He ceased ascending about half-way up the hill and began walking to his right, keeping a constant distance from the shore. He said to himself that he was having a look at the island, but his feeling was rather that the island was having a look at him. This was greatly increased by a discovery he made after he had been walking for about an hour, and which he ever afterwards found great difficulty in describing. In the most abstract terms it might be summed up by saying that the surface of the island was subject to tiny variations of light and shade which no change in the sky accounted for. If the air had not been calm and the ground weed too short and firm to move in the wind, he would have said that a faint breeze was playing with it, and working such slight alterations in the shading as it does in a cornfield on the Earth. Like the silvery noises in the air, these footsteps of light were shy of observation. Where he looked hardest they were least to be seen: on the edges of his field of vision they came crowding as though a complex arrangement of them were there in progress. To attend to any one of them was to make it invisible, and the minute brightness seemed often to have just left the spot where his eyes fell. He had no doubt that he was 'seeing'

- as much as he ever would see - the eldila. The sensation it produced in him was curious. It was not exactly uncanny, not as if he were surrounded by ghosts. It was not even as if he were being spied upon; he had rather the sense of being looked at by things that had a right to look. His feeling was less than fear; it had in it something of embarrassment, something of shyness, something of submission, and it was profoundly uneasy.

He felt tired and thought that in this favoured land it would be warm enough to rest out of doors. He sat down. The softness of the weed, the warmth and the sweet smell which pervaded the whole island, reminded him of Earth and gardens in summer. He closed his eyes a moment; then he opened them again and noticed buildings below him, and over the lake he saw a boat approaching. Recognition suddenly came to him. That was the ferry, and these buildings were the guesthouse beside the harbour; he had walked all around the island. A certain disappointment succeeded this discovery. He was beginning to feel hungry. Perhaps it would be a good plan to go down and ask for some food; at any rate it would pass the time.

But he did not do so. When he rose and looked more closely at the guesthouse he saw a considerable stir of creatures about it, and while he watched he saw that a full load of passengers was landing from the ferryboat. In the lake he saw some moving objects which he did not at first identify but which turned out to be sorns up to their middles in the water and obviously wading to Meldilorn from the mainland. There were about ten of them. For some reason or other the island was receiving an influx of visitors. He no longer supposed that any harm would be done to him if he went down and mixed in the crowd, but he felt a reluctance to do so. The situation brought vividly back to his mind his experience as a new boy at school - new boys came a day early - hanging about and watching the arrival of the old hands. In the end he decided not to go down. He cut and ate some of the ground-weed and dozed for a little.

In the afternoon, when it grew colder, he resumed his walking. Other hnau were roaming about the island by this time. He saw sorns chiefly, but this was because their height made them conspicuous. There was hardly any noise. His reluctance to meet these fellow-wanderers, who seemed to confine themselves to the coast of the island, drove him half consciously upwards and inwards. He found himself at last on the fringes of the grove and looking straight up the monolithic avenue. He had intended, for no very clearly defined reason, not to enter it, but he fell to studying the stone nearest to him, which was richly sculptured on all its four sides, and after that curiosity led him on from stone to stone.

The pictures were very puzzling. Side by side with representations of sorns and hrossa and what he supposed to be pfiltriggi there occurred again and again an upright wavy figure with only the suggestion of a face, and with wings. The wings were perfectly recognizable, and this puzzled him very much. Could it be that the traditions of Malacandrian art went back to that earlier geological and biological era when, as Augray had told him, there was life, including bird-life, on the harandra? The answer of the stones seemed to be Yes. He saw pictures of the old red forests with unmistakable birds flying among them, and many other creatures that he did not know. On another stone many of these were represented lying dead, and a fantastic hnakra-like figure, presumably symbolizing the cold, was depicted in the sky above them shooting at them with darts. Creatures still alive were crowding round the winged, wavy figure, which he took to be Oyarsa, pictured as a winged flame. On the next stone Oyarsa appeared, followed by many creatures, and apparently making a furrow with some pointed instrument. Another picture showed the furrow being enlarged by pfiltriggi with digging tools. Sorns were piling the earth up in pinnacles on each side, and hrossa seemed to be making water channels. Ransom wondered whether this were a mythical account of the making of handramits or whether they were conceivably artificial in fact.

Many of the pictures he could make nothing of: One that particularly puzzled him showed at the bottom a segment of a circle, behind and above which rose three-quarters of a disk divided into concentric rings. He thought it was a picture of the sun rising behind a hill; certainly the segment at the bottom was full of Malacandrian scenes - Oyarsa in Meldilorn, sorns on the mountain edge of the harandra, and many other things both familiar to him and strange. He turned from it to examine the disk which rose behind it. It was not the sun. The sun was there, unmistakably, at the centre of the disk: round this the concentric circles revolved. In the first and smallest of these was pictured a little ball, on which rode a winged figure something like Oyarsa, but holding what appeared to be a trumpet. In the next, a similar ball carried another of the flaming figures. This one, instead of even the suggested face, had two bulges which after long inspection he decided were meant to be the udders or breasts of a female mammal. By this time he was quite sure that he was looking at a picture of the solar system. The first ball was Mercury, the second Venus - 'And what an extraordinary coincidence,' thought Ransom, 'that their mythology, like ours, associates some idea of the female with Venus.' The problem would have occupied him longer if a natural curiosity had not drawn his eyes on to the next ball which must represent the Earth. When he saw it, his whole mind stood still for a moment. The ball was there, but where the flame-like figure should have been, a deep depression of irregular shape had been cut as if to erase it. Once, then - but his speculations faltered and became silent before a series of unknowns. He looked at the next circle. Here there was no ball. Instead, the bottom of this circle touched the top of the big segment filled with Malacandrian scenes, so that Malacandra at this point touched the solar system and came out of it in perspective towards the spectator. Now that his mind had grasped the design, he was astonished at the vividness of it all. He stood back and drew a deep breath preparatory to tackling some of the mysteries in which he was engulfed. Malacandra,

then, was Mars. The Earth - but at this point a sound of tapping or hammering, which had been going on for some time without gaining admission to his consciousness, became too insistent to be ignored. Some creature, and certainly not an eldil, was at work, close to him. A little startled - for he had been deep in thought - he turned round. There was nothing to be seen. He shouted out, idiotically, in English: 'Who's there?'

The tapping instantly stopped and a remarkable face appeared from behind a neighbouring monolith.

It was hairless like a man's or a sorn's. It was long and pointed like a shrew's, yellow and shabby-looking, and so low in the forehead that but for the heavy development of the head at the back and behind the ears (like a bag-wig) it could not have been that of an intelligent creature. A moment later the whole of the thing came into view with a startling jump. Ransom guessed that it was a pffltrigg - and was glad that he had not met one of this third race on his first arrival in Malacandra. It was much more insect-like or reptilian than anything he had yet seen. Its stature was distinctly that of a frog, and at first Ransom thought it was resting, frog-like, on its 'hands'. Then he noticed that that part of its fore-limbs on which it was supported was really, in human terms, rather an elbow than a hand. It was broad and padded and clearly made to be walked on; but upwards from it, at an angle of about forty-five degrees, went the true forearms - thin, strong forearms, ending in enormous, sensitive, many-fingered hands. He realized that for all manual work from mining to cutting cameos this creature had the advantage of being able to work with its full strength from a supported elbow. The insect-like effect was due to the speed and jerkiness of its movements and to the fact that it could swivel its head almost all the way round like a mantis; and it was increased by a kind of dry, rasping, jingling quality in the noise of its moving. It was rather like a grasshopper, rather

like one of Arthur Rackham's dwarfs, rather like a frog, and rather like a little old taxidermist whom Ransom knew in London.

'I come from another world,' began Ransom.

'I know, I know,' said the creature in a quick, twittering, rather impatient voice. 'Come here, behind the stone. This way, this way. Oyarsa's orders. Very busy. Must begin at once. Stand there.'

Ransom found himself on the other side of the monolith, staring at a picture which was still in process of completion. The ground was liberally strewn with chips and the air was full of dust.

'There,' said the creature. 'Stand still. Don't look at me. Look over there.'

For a moment Ransom did not quite understand what was expected of him; then, as he saw the pfifltrigg glancing to and fro at him and at the stone with the unmistakable glance of artist from model to work which is the same in all worlds, he realized and almost laughed. He was standing for his portrait! From his position he could see that the creature was cutting the stone as if it were cheese and the swiftness of its movements almost baffled his eyes, but he could get no impression of the work done, though he could study the pfifltrigg. He saw that the jingling and metallic noise was due to the number of small instruments which it carried about its body. Sometimes, with an exclamation of annoyance, it would throw down the tool it was working with and select one of these; but the majority of those in immediate use it kept in its mouth. He realized also that this was an animal artificially clothed like himself, in some bright scaly substance which appeared richly decorated though coated in dust. It had folds of furry clothing about its throat like a comforter, and its eyes were protected by dark bulging goggles. Rings and chains of a bright metal - not gold, he thought - adorned its limbs and neck. All the time it was working it kept up a sort of hissing whisper to itself; and when it was excited - which it usually

was - the end of its nose wrinkled like a rabbit's. At last it gave another startling leap, landed about ten yards away from its work, and said: 'Yes, yes. Not so good as I hoped. Do better another time. Leave it now. Come and see yourself.'

Ransom obeyed. He saw a picture of the planets, not now arranged to make a map of the solar system, but advancing in a single procession towards the spectator, and all, save one, bearing its fiery charioteer. Below lay Malacandra and there, to his surprise, was a very tolerable picture of the space-ship. Beside it stood three figures for all of which Ransom had apparently been the model. He recoiled from them in disgust. Even allowing for the strangeness of the subject from a Malacandrian point of view and for the stylization of their art, still, he thought, the creature might have made a better attempt at the human form than these stock-like dummies, almost as thick as they were tall, and sprouting about the head and neck into something that looked like fungus.

He hedged. 'I expect it is like me as I look to your people,' he said. 'It is not how they would draw me in my own world.'

'No,' said the pfifltrigg. 'I do not mean it to be too like. Too like, and they will not believe it - those who are born after.' He added a good deal more which was difficult to understand; but while he was speaking it dawned upon Ransom that the odious figures were intended as an idealization of humanity. Conversation languished for a little. To change the subject Ransom asked a question which had been in his mind for some time.

'I cannot understand,' he said, 'how you and the sorns and the hrossa all come to speak the same speech. For your tongues and teeth and throats must be very different.'

'You are right,' said the creature. 'Once We all had different speeches and we still have at home. But everyone has learned the speech of the hrossa.'

'Why is that?' said Ransom, still thinking in terms of terrestrial history. 'Did the hrossa once rule the others?'

'I do not understand. They are our great speakers and singers. They have more words and better. No one learns the speech of my people, for what we have to say is said in stone and sun's blood and stars' milk and all can see them. No one learns the sorns' speech, for you can change their knowledge into any words and it is still the same. You cannot do that with the songs of the hrossa. Their tongue goes all over Malacandra. I speak it to you because you are a stranger. I would speak it to a sorn. But we have our old tongues at home. You can see it in the names. The sorns have bigsounding names like Augray and Arkal and Belmo and Falmay. The hrossa have furry names like Hnoh and Hirthi and Hyoui and Hlithnahi.'

'The best poetry, then, comes in the roughest speech?'

'Perhaps,' said the pffltrigg. 'As the best pictures are made in the hardest stone. But my people have names like Kalakaperi and Parakataru and Tafalakeruf I am called Kanakaberaka.' Ransom told it his name.

'In our country,' said Kanakaberaka, 'it is not like this. We are not pinched in a narrow handramit. There are the true forests, the green shadows, the deep mines. It is warm. It does not blaze with light like this, and it is not silent like this. I could put you in a place there in the forests where you could see a hundred fires at once and hear a hundred hammers. I wish you had come to our country. We do not live in holes like the sorns nor in bundles of weed like the hrossa.' I could show you houses with a hundred pillars, one of sun's blood and the next of stars' milk, all the way... and all the world painted on the walls.'

'How do you rule yourselves?' asked Ransom. 'Those who are digging in the mines - do they like it as much as those who paint the walls?'

'All keep the mines open; it is a work to be shared. But each digs for himself the thing he wants for his work. What else would he do?'

'It is not so with us.'

'Then you must make very bent work. How would a maker understand working in sun's blood unless he went into the home of sun's blood himself and knew one kind from another and lived with it for days out of the light of the sky till it was in his blood and his heart, as if he thought it and ate it and spat it?'

'With us it lies very deep and hard to get and those who dig it must spend their whole lives on the skill.'

'And they love it?'

'I think not ... I do not know. They are kept at it because they are given no food if they stop.'

Kanakaberaka wrinkled his nose. Then there is not food in plenty on your world?'

'I do not know,' said Ransom. 'I have often wished to know the answer to that question but no one can tell me. Does no one keep your people at their work, Kanakaberaka?'

'Our females,' said the pffltrigg with a piping noise which was apparently his equivalent for a laugh.

'Are your females of more account among you than those of the other hnau among them?'

'Very greatly. The sorns make least account of females and we make most.'

## Chapter 18

THAT NIGHT Ransom slept in the guesthouse, which was a real house built by pffltriggi and richly decorated. His pleasure at finding himself, in this respect, under more human conditions was qualified by the discomfort which, despite his reason, he could not help feeling in the presence, at close quarters, of so many Malacandrian creatures. All three species were represented. They seemed to have no uneasy feelings towards each other, though there were some differences of the kind that occur in a railway carriage on Earth - the sorns finding the house too hot and the pffltriggi finding it too cold. He learned more of Malacandrian humour and of the noises that expressed it in this one night than he had learned during the whole of his life on the strange planet hitherto. Indeed, nearly all Malacandrian conversations in which he had yet taken part had been grave. Apparently, the comic spirit arose chiefly from the meeting of the different kinds of hnau. The jokes of all three were equally incomprehensible to him. He thought he could see differences in kind - as that the sorns seldom got beyond irony, while the hrossa were extravagant and fantastic, and the pffltriggi were sharp and excelled in abuse - but even when he understood all the words he could not see the points. He went early to bed.

It was at the time of early morning, when men on Earth go out to milk the cows, that Ransom was wakened. At first he did not know what had roused him. The chamber in which he lay was silent, empty and nearly dark. He was preparing himself to sleep again when a high-pitched voice close beside him said, 'Oyarsa sends for you.' He sat up, staring about him. There was no due there, and the voice repeated, 'Oyarsa sends for you. The confusion of sleep was now clearing in his head, and he recognized that there was an eldil in the room. He felt no conscious fear, but while he rose obediently and put on such of his clothes as he had laid aside he found that his heart was beating rather fast. He was thinking less of the invisible

creature in the room than of the interview that lay before him. His old terrors of meeting some monster or idol had quite left him: he felt nervous as he remembered feeling on the morning of an examination when he was an undergraduate. More than anything in the world he would have liked a cup of good tea.

The guest-house was empty. He went out. The bluish smoke was rising from the lake and the sky was bright behind the jagged eastern wall of the canyon; it was a few minutes before sunrise. The air was still very cold, the ground weed drenched with dew, and there was something puzzling about the whole scene which he presently identified with the silence. The eldil voices in the air had ceased and so had the shifting network of small lights and shades. Without being told, he knew that it was his business to go up to the crown of the island and the grove. As he approached them he saw with a certain sinking of heart that the monolithic avenue was full of Malacandrian creatures, and all silent. They were in two lines, one on each side; and all squatting or sitting in the various fashions suitable to their anatomies. He walked on slowly and doubtfully, not daring to stop, and ran the gauntlet of all those inhuman and unblinking eyes. When he had come to the very summit, at the middle of the avenue where the biggest of the stones rose, he stopped - he never could remember afterwards whether an eldil voice had told him to do so or whether it was an intuition of his own. He did not sit down, for the earth was too cold and wet and he was not sure if it would be decorous. He simply stood - motionless like a man on parade. All the creatures were looking at him and there was no noise anywhere.

He perceived, gradually, that the place was full of eldila. The lights, or suggestions of light, which yesterday had been scattered over the island, were now all congregated in this one spot, and were all stationary or very faintly moving. The sun had risen by now, and still no one spoke. As he looked up to see the first, pale sunlight upon the monoliths, he became

conscious that the air above him was full of a far greater complexity of light than the sunrise could explain, and light of a different kind, eldil-light. The sky, no less than the earth, was full of them; the visible Malacandrians were but the smallest part of the silent consistory which surrounded him. He might, when the time came, be pleading his cause before thousands or before millions: rank behind rank about him, and rank above rank over his head, the creatures that had never yet seen man and whom man could not see, were waiting for his trial to begin. He licked his lips, which were quite dry, and wondered if he would be able to speak when speech was demanded of him. Then it occurred to him that perhaps this - this waiting and being looked at was the trial; perhaps even now he was unconsciously telling them all they wished to know. But afterwards - a long time afterwards - there was a noise of movement. Every visible creature in the grove had risen to its feet and was standing, more hushed than ever, with its head bowed; and Ransom saw (if it could be called seeing) that Oyarsa was coming up between the long lines of sculptured stones. Partly he knew it from the faces of the Malacandrians as their lord passed them; partly he saw - he could not deny that he saw - Oyarsa himself. He never could say what it was like. The merest whisper of light - no, less than that, the smallest diminution of shadow - was travelling along the uneven surface of the ground-weed; or rather some difference in the look of the ground, too slight to be named in the language of the five senses, moved slowly towards him. Like a silence spreading over a room full of people, like an infinitesimal coolness on a sultry day, like a passing memory of some long-forgotten sound or scent, like all that is stillest and smallest and most hard to seize in nature, Oyarsa passed between his subjects and drew near and came to rest, not ten yards away from Ransom, in the centre of Meldilorn. 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 hrassa afterwards said to Ransom, 'with no blood in it. Light is instead of blood for them.' The words were not alarming.

'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,' said the voice. '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. These are not the real reasons.' Ransom said nothing.

'You began to be afraid of me before you set foot in my world. And you have spent all your time since then in flying from me. My servants saw your fear when you were in your ship in heaven. They saw that your own kind treated you ill, though they could not understand their speech. Then to deliver you out of the hands of those two I stirred up a hnakra to try if you would come to me of your own will. But you hid among the hrassa and though they told you to come to me, you would not. After that I sent my eldil to fetch you, but still you would not come. And in the end your own kind have chased you to me, and hnau's blood has been shed.'

'I do not understand, Oyarsa. Do you mean that it was you who sent for me from Thulcandra?'

'Yes. Did not the other two tell you this? And why did you come with them unless you meant to obey my call? My servants could not understand their talk to you when your ship was in heaven.'

'Your servants ... I cannot understand,' said Ransom.

'Ask freely,' said the voice.

'Have you servants out in the heavens?'

'Where else? There is nowhere else.'

'But you, Oyarsa, are here on Malacandra, as I am.'

'But Malacandra, like all worlds, floats in heaven. And I am not "here" altogether as you are, Ransom of Thulcandra. Creatures of your kind must drop out of heaven into a world; for us the worlds are places in heaven. But do not try to understand this now. It is enough to know that I and my servants are even now in heaven;' they were around you in the sky-ship no less than they are around you here.'

Then you knew of our journey before we left Thulcandra?'

'No. Thulcandra is the world we do not know. It alone is outside the heaven, and no message comes from it.'

Ransom was silent, but Oyarsa answered his unspoken questions.

'It was not always so. Once we knew the Oyarsa of your world - he was brighter and greater than I - and then we did not call it Thulcandra. It is the longest of all stories and the bitterest. He became bent. That was before any life came on your world. Those were the Bent Years of which we still speak in the heavens, when he was not yet bound to Thulcandra but free like us. It was in his mind to spoil other worlds besides his own. He smote your moon with his left hand and with his right he brought the cold death on my harandra before its time; if by my arm Maleldil had not opened the handramits and let out the hot springs, my world would have been unpeopled. We did not leave him so at large for long. There was great war, and we drove him back out of the heavens and bound him in the air of his own world as Maleldil taught us. There doubtless he lies to this hour, and we know no more of that planet: it is silent. We think that Maleldil would not give it up utterly to the Bent One, and there are stories among us that He has taken strange counsel and dared terrible things, wrestling with the

Bent One in Thulcandra. But of this we know less than you; it is a thing we desire to look into.'

It was some time before Ransom spoke again and Oyarsa respected his silence. When he had collected himself he said: 'After this story, Oyarsa, I may tell you that our world is very bent. The two who brought me knew nothing of you, but only that the sorns had asked for me. They thought you were a false eldil, I think. There are false eldila in the wild parts of our world; men kill other men before them - they think the eldil drinks blood. They thought the sorns wanted me for this or for some other evil. They brought me by force. I was in terrible fear. The tellers of tales in our world make us think that if there is any life beyond our own air, it is evil.'

'I understand,' said the voice. 'And this explains things that I have wondered at. As soon as your journey had passed your own air and entered heaven, my servants told me that you seemed to be coming unwillingly and that the others had secrets from you. I did not think any creature could be so bent as to bring another of its own kind here by force.' 'They did not know what you wanted me for, Oyarsa. Nor do I know yet.'

'I will tell you. Two years ago - and that is about four of your years - this ship entered the heavens from your world. We followed its journey all the way hither and eldila were with it as it sailed over the harandra, and when at last it came to rest in the handramit more than half my servants were standing round it to see the strangers come out. All beasts we kept back from the place, and no hnau yet knew of it. When the strangers had walked to and fro on Malacandra and made themselves a hut and their fear of a new world ought to have worn off; I sent certain sorns to show themselves and to teach the strangers our language. I chose sorns because they are most like your people in form. The Thulcandrians feared the sorns and were very unteachable. The sorns went to them many times and taught them a little. They reported to me that the Thulcandrians were taking sun's blood

wherever they could find it in the streams. When I could make nothing of them by report, I told the sorns to bring them to me, not by force but courteously. They would not come. I asked for one of them, but not even one of them would come. It would have been easy to take them; but though we saw they were stupid we did not know yet how bent they were, and I did not wish to stretch my authority beyond the creatures of my own world. I told the sorns to treat them like cubs, to tell them that they would be allowed to pick up no more of the sun's blood until one of their race came to me. When they were told this, they stuffed as much as they could into the sky-ship and went back to their own world. We wondered at this, but now it is plain. They thought I wanted one of your race to eat, and went to fetch one. If they had come a few miles to see me I would have received them honourably; now they have twice gone a voyage of millions of miles for nothing and will appear before me none the less. And you also, Ransom of Thulcandra, you have taken many vain troubles to avoid standing where you stand now.

'That is true, Oyarsa. Bent creatures are full of fears. But I am here now and ready to know your will with me.'

'Two things I wanted to ask of your race. First I must know why you come here - so much is my duty to my world. And secondly I wish to hear of Thulcandra and of Maleldil's strange wars there with the Bent One; for that, as I have said, is a thing we desire to look into.'

'For the first question, Oyarsa, I have come here because I was brought. Of the others, one cares for nothing but the sun's blood, because in our world he can exchange it for many pleasures and powers. But the other means evil to you. I think he would destroy all your people to make room for our people; and then he would do the same with other worlds again. He wants our race to last for always, I think and he hopes they will leap from world

to world ... always going to a new sun when an old one dies... or something like that.'

'Is he wounded in his brain?'

'I do not know. Perhaps I do not describe his thoughts right. He is more learned than I.'

'Does he think he could go to the great worlds? Does he think Maleldil wants a race to live forever?'

'He does not know there is any Maleldil. But what is certain, Oyarsa, is that he means evil to your world. Our kind must not be allowed to come here again. If you can prevent it only by killing all three of us, I am content.'

'If you were my own people I would kill them now, Ransom, and you soon; for they are bent beyond hope, and you, when you have grown a little braver, will be ready to go to Maleldil. But my authority is over my own world. It is a terrible thing to kill someone else's hnau. It will not be necessary.'

'They are strong, Oyarsa, and they can throw death many miles and can blow killing airs at their enemies.'

'The least of my servants could touch their ship before it reached Malacandra, while it was in the heaven, and make it a body of different movements - for you, no body at all. Be sure that no one of your race will come into my world again unless I call him. But enough of this. Now tell me of Thulcandra. Tell me all. We know nothing since the day when the Bent One sank out of heaven into the air of your world, wounded in the very light of his light. But why have you become afraid again?'

'I am afraid of the lengths of time, Oyarsa ... or perhaps I do not understand. Did you not say this happened before there was life on Thulcandra?'

'Yes.'

'And you, Oyarsa? You have lived... and that picture on the stone where the cold is killing them on the harandra? Is that a picture of something that was before my world began?'

'I see you are hnau after all,' said the voice. 'Doubtless no stone that faced the air then would be a stone now, The picture has begun to crumble away and been copied again more times than there are eldila in the air above us. But it was copied right. In that way you are seeing a picture that was finished when your world was still half made. But do not think of these things. My people have a law never to speak much of sizes or numbers to you others, not even to sorns. You do not understand, and it makes you do reverence to nothings and pass by what is really great. Rather tell me what Maleldil has done in Thulcandra.'

'According to our traditions -' Ransom was beginning, when an unexpected disturbance broke in upon the solemn stillness of the assembly. A large party almost a procession, was approaching the grove, from the direction of the ferry. It consisted entirely, so far as he could see, of hrossa, and they appeared to be carrying something.

## Chapter 19

AS THE procession drew nearer Ransom saw that the foremost hrossa were supporting three long and narrow burdens. They carried them on their heads, four hrossa to each. After these came a number of others armed with harpoons and apparently guarding two creatures which he did not recognize. The light was behind them as they entered between the two farthest monoliths. They were much shorter than any animal he had yet seen on Malacandra, and he gathered that they were bipeds, though the lower limbs were so thick and sausage like that he hesitated to call them legs. The bodies were a little narrower at the top than at the bottom so as

to be veiy slightly pear-shaped, and the heads were neither round like those of hrossa nor long like those of sorns, but almost square. They stumped along on narrow, heavy-looking feet which they seemed to press into the ground with unnecessary violence. And now their faces were becoming visible as masses of lumped and puckered flesh of variegated colour fringed in some bristly, dark substance.... Suddenly, with an indescribable change of feeling, he realized that he was looking at men. The two prisoners were Weston and Devine and he, for one privileged moment, had seen the human form with almost Malacandrian eyes.

The leaders of the procession had now advanced to within a few yards of Oyarsa and laid down their burdens. These, he now saw, were three dead hrossa laid on biers of some unknown metal; they were on their backs and their eyes, not closed as we close the eyes of human dead, stared disconcertingly up at the far-off golden canopy of the grove. One of them he took to be Hyoi, and it was certainly Hyoi's brother, Hyahi, who now came forward, and after an obeisance to Oyarsa began to speak.

Ransom at first did not hear what he was saying, for his attention was concentrated on Weston and Devine. They were weaponless and vigilantly guarded by the armed hrossa about them. Both of them, like Ransom himself had let their beards grow ever since they landed on Malacandra, and both were pale and travel stained. Weston was standing with folded arms, and his face wore a fixed, even an elaborate, expression of desperation. Devine, with his hands in his pockets, seemed to be in a state of furious sulks. Both clearly thought that they had good reason to fear, though neither was by any means lacking in courage. Surrounded by their guards as they were, and intent on the scene before them, they had not noticed Ransom.

He became aware of what Hyoi's brother was saying. 'For the death of these two, Oyarsa, I do not so much complain, for when we fell upon the hmana

by night they were in terror. You may say it was as a hunt and these two were killed as they might have been by a hnahra. But Hyoui they hit from afar with a coward's weapon when he had done nothing to frighten them. And now he lies there (and I do not say it because he was my brother, but all the handramit knows it) and he was a hnadrapunt and a great poet and the loss of him is heavy.'

The voice of Oyarsa spoke for the first time to the two men.

'Why have you killed my hnau?' it said.

Weston and Devine looked anxiously about them to identify the speaker.

'God!' exclaimed Devine in English. 'Don't tell me they've got a loudspeaker.'

'Ventriloquism,' replied Weston in a husky whisper. 'Quite common among savages. The witch-doctor or medicine-man pretends to go into a trance and he does it. The thing to do is to identify the medicine-man and address your remarks to him wherever the voice seems to come from; it shatters his nerve and shows you've seen through him. Do you see any of the brutes in a trance? By Jove - I've spotted him.'

Due credit must be given to Weston for his power of observation: he had picked out the only creature in the assembly which was not standing in an attitude of reverence and attention. This was an elderly hross close beside him. It was squatting; and its eyes were shut. Taking a step towards it, he struck a defiant attitude and exclaimed in a loud voice (his knowledge of the language was elementary): 'Why you take our puff-bangs away? We very angry with you. We not afraid.'

On Weston's hypothesis his action ought to have been impressive. Unfortunately for him, no one else shared his theory of the elderly hross's behaviour. The hross who was well known to all of them, including Ransom

- had not come with the funeral procession. It had been in its place since dawn. Doubtless it intended no disrespect to Oyarsa; but it must be confessed that it had yielded, at a much earlier stage in the proceedings, to an infirmity which attacks elderly hnau of all species, and was by this time enjoying a profound and refreshing slumber. One of its whiskers twitched a little as Weston shouted in its face, but its eyes remained shut.

The voice of Oyarsa spoke again. 'Why do you speak to him?' it said. 'It is I who ask you. Why have you killed my hnau?'

'You let us go, then we talkee-talkee,' bellowed Weston at the sleeping hross. 'You think we no power, think you do all you like. You no can. Great big headman in sky he send us. You no do what I say, he come, blow you all up - Pouff! Bang!'

'I do not know what bang means,' said the voice. 'But why have you killed my hnau?'

'Say it was an accident,' muttered Devine to Weston in English.

'I've told you before,' replied Weston in the same language. 'You don't understand how to deal with natives. One sign of yielding and they'll be at our throats. The only thing is to intimidate them.'

'All right! Do your stuff; then,' growled Devine. He was obviously losing faith in his partner.

Weston cleared his throat and again rounded on the elderly hross.

'We kill him,' he shouted 'Show what we can do. Everyone who no do all we say pouff! bang! - kill him same as that one. You do all we say and we give you much pretty things. See! See!' To Ransom's intense discomfort, Weston at this point whipped out of his pocket a brightly coloured necklace of beads, the undoubted work of Mr Woolworth, and began dangling it in

front of the faces of his guards, turning slowly round and round and repeating, 'Pretty, pretty! See! See!'

The result of this maneuver was more striking than Weston himself had anticipated. Such a roar of sounds as human ears had never heard before - baying of hrossa, piping of pfifltriggi, booming of sorns - burst out and rent the silence of that august place, waking echoes from the distant mountain walls. Even in the air above them there was a faint ringing of the eldil voices. It is greatly to Weston's credit that though he paled at this he did not lose his nerve.

'You no roar at me,' he thundered. 'No try make me afraid. Me no afraid of you.'

'You must forgive my people,' said the voice of Oyarsa - and even it was subtly changed but they are not roaring at you. They are only laughing.

But Weston did not know the Malacandrian word for laugh: indeed, it was not a word he understood very well in any language Ransom, biting his lips with mortification, almost prayed that one experiment with the beads would satisfy the scientist; but that was because he did not know Weston. The latter saw that the clamour had subsided. He knew that he was following the most orthodox rules for frightening and then conciliating primitive races; and he was not the man to be deterred by one or two failures. The roar that went up from the throats of all spectators as he again began revolving like a slow motion picture of a humming-top, occasionally mopping his brow with his left hand and conscientiously jerking the necklace up and down with his right, completely drowned anything he might be attempting to say; but Ransom saw his lips moving and had little doubt that he was working away at 'Pretty, pretty!' Then suddenly the sound of laughter almost redoubled its volume. The stars in their courses were fighting against Weston. Some hazy memory of efforts made long

since to entertain an infant niece had begun to penetrate his highly trained mind. He was bobbing up and down from the knees and holding his head on one side; he was almost dancing; and he was by now very hot indeed. For all Ransom knew he was saying 'Diddle, diddle, diddle.'

It was sheer exhaustion which ended the great physicist's performance - the most successful of its kind ever given on Malacandra - and with it the sonorous raptures of his audience. As silence returned Ransom heard Devine's voice in English: 'For God's sake stop making a buffoon of yourself Weston,' it said. 'Can't you see it won't work?'

'It doesn't seem to be working,' admitted Weston, 'and I'm inclined to think they have even less intelligence than we supposed. Do you think, perhaps, if I tried it just once again - or would you like to try this time?'

'Oh, Hell!' said Devine, and, turning his back on his partner, Sat down abruptly on the ground, produced his cigarette case and began to smoke.

'I'll give it to the witch-doctor,' said Weston during the moment of silence which Devine's action had produced among the mystified spectators; and before anyone could stop him he took a step forward and attempted to drop the string of beads round the elderly hross's neck. The hross's head was, however, too large for this operation and the necklace merely settled on its forehead like a crown, slightly over one eye. It shifted its head a little, like a dog worried with flies, snorted gently, and resumed its sleep.

Oyarsa's voice now addressed Ransom. 'Are your fellow-creatures hurt in their brains, Ransom of Thulcandra?' it said. 'Or are they too much afraid to answer my questions?'

'I think, Oyarsa,' said Ransom, 'that they do not believe you are there. And they believe that all these hnau are - are like very young cubs. The thicker hman is trying to frighten them and then to please them with gifts.'

At the sound of Ransom's voice, the two prisoners turned sharply around. Weston was about to speak when Ransom interrupted him hastily in English: 'Listen, Weston. It is not a trick. There really is a creature there in the middle - there where you can see a kind of light, or a kind of something, if you look hard. And it is at least as intelligent as a man - they seem to live an enormous time. Stop treating it like a child and answer its questions. And if you take my advice, you'll speak the truth and not bluster.'

'The brutes seem to have intelligence enough to take you in, anyway,' growled Weston; but it was in a somewhat modified voice that he turned once more to the sleeping hross - the desire to wake up the supposed witch-doctor was becoming an obsession - and addressed it.

'We sorry we kill him,' he said, pointing to Hyoui. 'No go to kill him. Sorns tell us bring man, give him your big head. We got away back into sky. He come' (here he indicated Ransom) 'with us. He very bent man, run away, no do what sorns say like us. We run after him, get him back for sorns, want to do what we say and sorns tell us, see? He not let us. Run away, run, run. We run after. See a big black one, think he kill us, we kill him - pouff! bang! All for bent man. He no run away, he be good, we no run after, no kill big black one, see? You have bent man - bent man make all trouble - you plenty keep him, let us go. He afraid of you, we no afraid. Listen -'

At this moment Weston's continual bellowing in the face of the hross at last produced the effect he had striven for so long. The creature opened its eyes and stared mildly at him in some perplexity. Then, gradually realizing the impropriety of which it had been guilty, it rose slowly to its standing position, bowed respectfully to Oyarsa, and finally waddled out of the assembly still carrying the necklace draped over its right ear and eye. Weston, his mouth still open, followed the retreating figure with his gaze till it vanished among the stems of the grove.

It was Oyarsa who broke the silence... 'We have had mirth enough,' he said, 'and it is time to hear true answers to our questions. Something is wrong in your head, hnau from Thulcandra. There is too much blood in it. Is Firikitekila here?'

'Here Oyarsa,' said a pfifltrigg.

'Have you in your cisterns water that has been made cold?'

'Yes, Oyarsa.'

'Then let this thick hnau be taken to the guesthouse and let them bathe his head in cold water. Much water and many times. Then bring him again. Meanwhile I will provide for my killed hrossa.'

Weston did not clearly understand what the voice said - indeed, he was still too busy trying to find out where it came from - but terror smote him as he found himself wrapped in the strong arms of the surrounding hrossa and forced away from his place. Ransom would gladly have shouted out some reassurance, but Weston himself was shouting too loud to hear him. He was mixing English and Malacandrian now, and the last that was heard was a rising scream of 'Pay for this - pouff! bang! - Ransom, for God's sake - Ransom! Ransom!'

'And now -' said Oyarsa, when silence was restored, 'let us honour my dead hnau.'

At his words ten of the hrossa grouped themselves about the biers. Lifting their heads, and with no signal given as far as Ransom could see, they began to sing.

To every man, in his acquaintance with a new art, there comes a moment when that which before was meaningless first lifts, as it were, one corner of the curtain that hides its mystery, and reveals, in a burst of delight which later and fuller understanding can hardly ever equal, one glimpse of the

indefinite possibilities within. For Ransom, this moment had now come in his understanding of Malacandrian song. Now first he saw that its rhythms were based on a different blood from ours, on a heart that beat more quickly, and a fiercer internal heat. Through his knowledge of the creatures and his love for them he began, ever so little, to hear it with their ears. A sense of great masses moving at visionary speeds, of giants dancing, of eternal sorrows eternally consoled, of he knew not what and yet what he had always known, awoke in him with the very first bars of the deep-mouthed dirge, and bowed down his spirit as if the gate of heaven had opened before him.

'Let it go hence,' they sang. 'Let it go hence, dissolve and be no body. Drop it, release it, drop it gently, as a stone is loosed from fingers drooping over a still pool. Let it go down, sink, fall away. Once below the surface there are no divisions, no layers in the water yielding all the way down; all one and all unwounded is that element. Send it voyaging; it will not come again. Let it go down; the hnau rises from it. This is the second life, the other beginning. Open, oh coloured world, without weight, without shore. You are second and better; this was first and feeble. Once the worlds were hot within and brought forth life, but only the pale plants, the dark plants. We see their children when they grow today, out of the sun's light in the sad places. After, the heaven made grow another kind of worlds; the high climbers, the brightheaded forests, cheeks of flowers. First were the darker, then the brighter. First was the worlds' brood, then the suns' brood.'

This was as much of it as he contrived later to remember and could translate. As the song ended Oyarsa said: 'Let us scatter the movements which were their bodies. So will Maleldil scatter all worlds when the first and feeble is worn.'

He made a sign to one of the pfifltriggi, who instantly arose and approached the corpses. The hrossa, now singing again but very softly, drew back at

least ten paces. The pfifltrigg touched each of the three dead in turn with some small object that appeared to be made of glass or crystal and then jumped away with one of his frog-like leaps. Ransom closed his eyes to protect them from a blinding light and felt something like a very strong wind blowing in his face, for a fraction of a second. Then all was calm again, and the three biers were empty.

'God! That would be a trick worth knowing on earth,' said Devine to Ransom. 'Solves the murderer's problem about the disposal of the body, eh?'

But Ransom, who was thinking of Hyoui, did not answer him; and before he spoke again everyone's attention was diverted by the return of the unhappy Weston among his guards.

## Chapter 20

THE hross who headed this procession was a conscientious creature and began at once explaining itself in a rather troubled voice.

'I hope we have done right, Oyarsa,' it said. 'But we do not know. We dipped his head in the cold water seven times, but the seventh time something fell off it. We had thought it was the top of his head, but now we saw it was a covering made of the skin of some other creature. Then some said we had done your will with the seven dips, and others said not. In the end we dipped it seven times more. We hope that was right. The creature talked a lot between the dips, and most between the second seven, but we could not understand it.'

'You have done very well, Hnool,' said Oyarsa. 'Stand away that I may see it, for now I will speak to it.'

The guards fell away on each side. Weston's usually pale face, under the bracing influence of the cold water, had assumed the colour of a ripe tomato, and his hair, which had naturally not been cut since he reached Malacandra, was plastered in straight, lank masses across his forehead. A good deal of water was still dripping over his nose and ears. His expression unfortunately wasted on an audience ignorant of terrestrial physiognomy - was that of a brave man suffering in a great cause, and rather eager than reluctant to face the worst or even to provoke it. In explanation of his conduct it is only fair to remember that he had already that morning endured all the terrors of an expected martyrdom and all the anticlimax of fourteen compulsory cold douches. Devine, who knew his man, shouted out to Weston in English: 'Steady, Weston. These devils can split the atom or something pretty like it. Be careful what you say to them and don't let's have any of your bloody nonsense.'

'Huh!' said Weston. 'So you've gone native too?'

'Be silent,' said the voice of Oyarsa. 'You, thick one, have told me nothing of yourself so I will tell it to you. In your own world you have attained great wisdom concerning bodies and by this you have been able to make a ship that can cross the heaven; but in all other things you have the mind of an animal. When first you came here, I sent for you, meaning you nothing but honour. The darkness in your mind filled you with fear. Because you thought I meant evil to you, you went as a beast goes against a beast of some other kind, and snared this Ransom. You would give him up to the evil you feared. Today, seeing him here, to save your own life, you would have given him to me a second time, still thinking I meant him hurt. These are your dealings with your own kind. And what you intend to my people, I know. Already you have killed some. And you have come here to kill them all. To you it is nothing whether a creature is hnau or not. At first I thought this was because you cared only whether a creature had a body like your own; but

Ransom has that and you would kill him as lightly as any of my hnau. I did not know that the Bent One had done so much in your world and still I do not understand it. If you were mine, I would unbody you even now. Do not think follies; by my hand Maleldil does greater things than this, and I can unmake you even on the borders of your own world's air. But I do not yet resolve to do this. It is for you to speak. Let me see if there is anything in your mind besides fear and death and desire.'

Weston turned to Ransom. 'I see,' he said, 'that you have chosen the most momentous crisis in the history of the human race to betray it.' Then he turned in the direction of the voice.

'I know you kill us,' he said. 'Me not afraid. Others come, make it our world -'

But Devine had jumped to his feet, and interrupted him.

'No, no, Oyarsa,' he shouted. 'You no listen him. He very foolish man, he have dreams. We little people, only want pretty sun-bloods. You give us plenty sun-bloods, we go back into sky, you never see us no more. All done, see?'

'Silence,' said Oyarsa. There was an almost imperceptible change in the light, if it could be called light, out of which the voice came, and Devine crumpled up and fell back on the ground. When he resumed his sitting position, he was white and panting.

'Speak on,' said Oyarsa to Weston.

Me ..... no...' began Weston in Malacandrian and then broke off: 'I can't say what I want in their accursed language,' he said in English.

'Speak to Ransom and he shall turn it into our speech,' said Oyarsa.

Weston accepted the arrangement at once. He believed that the hour of his death was come and he was determined to utter the thing - almost the only

thing outside his own science which he had to say. He cleared his throat, almost he struck a gesture, and began:

'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 in English. 'That's about as much as I can manage at one go.' Then, turning to Oyarsa, he began translating as well as he could. The process was difficult and the result - which he felt to be rather unsatisfactory - was something like this:

'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. He says that, among you, hnau of one kindred all live together and the hrossa have spears like those we used a very long time ago and your huts are small and round and your boats small and light and like our old ones, and you have one ruler. He says it is different with us. He says we know much. There is a thing happens in our world when the body of a living creature feels pains and becomes weak, and he says we sometimes know how to stop it. He says we have many bent people and we kill them or shut them in huts and that we have people for settling quarrels between the bent hnau about their huts and mates and things. He says we have many ways for the hnau of one land to kill those of another and some are trained to do it. He says we build very big and strong huts of stones and other things - like the pfiltriggi. And he says we exchange many things among ourselves and can carry heavy

weights very quickly a long way. Because of all this, he says it would not be the act of a bent hnau if our people killed all your people.' As soon as Ransom had finished, Weston continued.

'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. But he goes on to say that the only good thing is that there should be very many creatures alive. He says there were many other animals before the first men and the later ones were better than the earlier ones; but he says the animals were not born because of what is said to the young about bent and good action by their elders. And he says these animals did not feel any pity.' 'She,' began Weston.

'I'm sorry,' interrupted Ransom, 'but I've forgotten who She is.'

'Life, of course,' snapped Weston. 'She has ruthlessly broken down all obstacles and liquidated all failures and today in her highest form civilized man - and in me as his representative, she presses forward to that interplanetary leap which will, perhaps, place her for ever beyond the reach of death.'

'He says,' resumed Ransom, 'that these animals learned to do many difficult things, except those who could not; and those ones died and the other animals did not pity them. And he says the best animal now is the kind of man who makes the big huts and carries the heavy weights and does all the other things I told you about; and he is one of these and he says that if the others all knew what he was doing they would be pleased. He says that if

he could kill you all and bring our people to live in Malacandra, then they might be able to go on living here after something had gone wrong with our world. And then if something went wrong with Malacandra they might go and kill all the hnau in another world. And then another - and so they would never die out.

'It is in her right,' said Weston, 'the right, or, if you will, the might of Life herself, that I am prepared without flinching to plant the flag of man on the soil of Malacandra: to march on, step by step, superseding, where necessary, the lower forms of life that we find, claiming planet after planet, system after system, till our posterity - whatever strange form and yet unguessed mentality they have assumed - dwell in the universe wherever the universe is habitable.'

'He says,' translated Ransom, 'that because of this it would not be a bent action - or else, he says, it would be a possible action - for him to kill you all and bring us here. He says he would feel no pity. He is saying again that perhaps they would be able to keep moving from one world to another and wherever they came they would kill everyone. I think he is now talking about worlds that go round other suns. He wants the creatures born from us to be in as many places as they can. He says he does not know what kind of creatures they will be.'

'I may fall,' said Weston. 'But while I live I will not, with such a key in my hand, consent to close the gates of the future on my race. What lies in that future, beyond our present ken, passes imagination to conceive: it is enough for me that there is a Beyond.'

'He is saying,' Ransom translated, 'that he will not stop trying to do all this unless you kill him. And he says that though he doesn't know what will happen to the creatures sprung from us, he wants it to happen very much.'

Weston, who had now finished his statement, looked round instinctively for a chair to sink into. On Earth he usually sank into a chair as the applause began. Finding none he was not the kind of man to sit on the ground like Devine - he folded his arms and stared with a certain dignity about him.

'It is well that I have heard you,' said Oyarsa. 'For though your mind is feebler, your will is less bent than I thought. It is not for yourself that you would do all this.'

'No,' said Weston proudly in Malacandrian. 'Me die. Man live.'

'Yet you know that these creatures would have to be made quite unlike you before they lived on other worlds.'

'Yes, yes. All new. No one know yet. Strange Big!'

'Then it is not the shape of body that you love?'

'No. Me no care how they shaped.'

'One would think, then, that it is for the mind you care. But that cannot be, or you would love hnau wherever you met it.'

'No care for hnau. Care for man.'

'But if it is neither man's mind, which is as the mind of all other hnau - is not Maleldil maker of them all? - nor his body, which will change - if you care for neither of these, what do you mean by man?'

This had to be translated to Weston. When he understood, he replied: 'Me care for man - care for our race - what man begets-' He had to ask Ransom the words for race and beget.

'Strange!' said Oyarsa. 'You do not love any one of your race - you would have let me kill Ransom. You do not love the mind of your race, nor the body. Any kind of creature will please you if only it is begotten by your kind'

as they now are. It seems to me, Thick One, that what you really love is no completed creature but the very seed itself: for that is all that is left.'

'Tell him,' said Weston when he had been made to understand this, 'that I don't pretend to be a metaphysician. I have not come here to chop logic. If he cannot understand - as apparently you can't either - anything so fundamental as a man's loyalty to humanity, I can't make him understand it.'

But Ransom was unable to translate this and the voice of Oyarsa continued: '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?'

'Me tell you. Make man live all the time.'

'But are your wise men so ignorant as not to know that Malacandra is older than your own world and nearer its death? Most of it is dead already. My

people live only in the handramits; the heat and the water have been more and will be less. Soon now, very soon, I will end my world and give back my people to Maleldil.'

'Me know all that plenty. This only first try. Soon they go on another world.'

'But do you not know that all worlds will die?'

'Men go jump off each before it deads - on and on, see?'

'And when all are dead?'

Weston was silent. After a time Oyarsa spoke again. 'Do you not ask why my people, whose world is old, have not rather come to yours and taken it long ago.'

'Ho! Ho!' said Weston. 'You not know how.'

'You are wrong,' said Oyarsa. 'Many thousands of thousand years before this, when nothing yet lived on your world, the cold death was coming on my harandra. Then I was in deep trouble, not chiefly for the death of my hnau. - Maleldil does not make them long-livers - but for the things which the lord of your world, who was not yet bound, put into their minds. He would have made them as your people are now - wise enough to see the death of their kind approaching but not wise enough to endure it. Bent counsels would soon have risen among them. They were well able to have made sky-ships. By me Maleldil stopped them. Some I cured, some I unbodied.'

'And see what come!' interrupted Weston. 'You now very few - shut up in handramits - soon all die.'

'Yes,' said Oyarsa, 'but one thing we left behind us on the harandra: fear. And with fear, murder and rebellion. The weakest of my people does not fear death. It is the Bent One, the lord of your world, who wastes your lives

and befouls them with flying from what you know will overtake you in the end. If you were subjects of Maleldil you would have peace.'

Weston writhed in the exasperation born of his desire to speak and his ignorance of the language.

'Trash! Defeatist trash!' he shouted at Oyarsa in English; then, drawing himself up to his full height, he added in Malacandrian, 'You say your Maleldil let all go dead. Other one, Bent One, he fight, jump, live - not all talkee-talkee. Me no care Maleldil. Like Bent One better: me on his side.'

'But do you not see that he never will nor can,' began Oyarsa, and then broke off, as if recollecting himself. 'But I must learn more of your world from Ransom, and for that I need till night. I will not kill you, not even the thin one, for you are out of my world. Tomorrow you shall go hence again in your ship.'

"Devine's face suddenly fell. He began talking rapidly in English.

'For God's sake, Weston, make him understand. We've been here for months - the Earth is not in opposition now. Tell him it can't be done. He might as well kill us at once.'

'How long will your journey be to Thulcandra?' asked Oyarsa.

Weston, using Ransom as his interpreter, explained that the journey, in the present position of the two planets, was almost impossible. The distance had increased by millions of miles. The angle of their course to the solar rays would be totally different from that which he had counted upon. Even if by a hundredth chance they could hit the Earth, it was almost certain that their supply of oxygen would be exhausted long before they arrived.

'Tell him to kill us now,' he added.

'All this I know,' said Oyarsa. 'And if you stay in my world I must kill you: no such creature will I suffer in Malacandra. I know there is small chance of

your reaching your world; but small is not the same as none. Between now and the next noon choose which you will take. In the meantime, tell me this. If you reach it at all, what is the most time you will need?'

After a prolonged calculation, Weston, in a shaken voice, replied that if they had not made it in ninety days, they would never make it, and they would, moreover, be dead of suffocation.

'Ninety days you shall have,' said Oyarsa. 'My sorns and pffltriggi will give you air (we also have that art) and food for ninety days. But they will do something else to your ship. I am not minded that it should return into the heaven if once it reaches Thulcandra. You, Thick One, were not here when I unmade my dead hrossa whom you killed: the Thin One will tell you. This I can do, as Maleldil has taught me, over a gap of time or a gap of place. Before your sky-ship rises, my sorns will have so dealt with it that on the ninetieth day it will unbody, it will become what you call nothing. If that day finds it in heaven your death will be no bitterer because of this; but do not tarry in your ship if once you touch Thulcandra. Now lead these two away, and do you, my children, go where you will. But I must talk with Ransom.'

## Chapter 21

ALL THAT afternoon Ransom remained alone answering Oyarsa's questions. I am not allowed to record this conversation, beyond saying that the voice concluded it with the words: 'You have shown me more wonders than are known in the whole of heaven.'

After that they discussed Ransom's own future. He was given full liberty to remain in Malacandra or to attempt the desperate voyage to Earth. The problem was agonizing to him. In the end he decided to throw in his lot with Weston and Devine.

'Love of our own kind,' he said, 'is not the greatest of laws, but you, Oyarsa, have said it is a law. If I cannot live in Thulcandra, it is better for me not to live at all.'

'You have chosen rightly,' said Oyarsa. 'And I will tell you two things. My people will take all the strange weapons out of the ship, but they will give one to you. And the eldila of deep heaven will be about your ship till it reaches the air of Thulcandra, and often in it. They will not let the other two kill you.'

It had not occurred to Ransom before that his own murder might be one of the first expedients for economizing food and oxygen which would occur to Weston and Devine. He thanked Oyarsa for his protective measures. Then the great eldil dismissed him with these words:

'You are guilty of no evil, Ransom of Thulcandra, except a little fearfulness. For that, the journey you go on is your pain, and perhaps your cure: for you must be either mad or brave before it is ended. But I lay also a command on you; you must watch this Weston and this Devine in Thulcandra if ever you arrive there. They may yet do much evil in, and beyond, your world. From what you have told me, I begin to see that there are eldila who go down into your air, into the very stronghold of the Bent One; your world is not so fast shut as was thought in these parts of heaven. Watch those two bent ones. Be courageous. Fight them. And when you have need, some of our people will help. Maleldil will show them to you. It may even be that you and I shall meet again while you are still in the body; for it is not without the wisdom of Maleldil that we have met now and I have learned so much of your world. It seems to me that this is the beginning of more comings and goings between the heavens and the worlds and between one world and another, though not such as the Thick One hoped. I am slowed to tell you this. The year we are now in but heavenly years are not as yours - has long been prophesied as a year of stirrings and high changes and the siege

of Thulcandra may be near its end. Great things are on foot. If Maleldil does not forbid me, I will not hold aloof from them. And now, farewell.'

It was through vast crowds of all the Malacandrian species that the three human beings embarked next day on their terrible journey. Weston was pale and haggard from a night of calculations intricate enough to tax any mathematician even if his life did not hang on them. Devine was noisy, reckless and a little hysterical. His whole view of Malacandra had been altered overnight by the discovery that the 'natives' had an alcoholic drink, and he had even been trying to teach them to smoke. Only the pfifltriggi had made much of it. He was now consoling himself for an acute headache and the prospect of a lingering death by tormenting Weston. Neither partner was pleased to find that all weapons had been removed from the spaceship, but in other respects everything was as they wished it. At about an hour after noon Ransom took a last, long look at the blue waters, purple forest and remote green walls of the familiar handramit, and followed the other two through the manhole. Before it was closed Weston warned them that they must economize air by absolute stillness. No unnecessary movement must be made during their voyage; even talking must be prohibited.

'I shall speak only in an emergency,' he said.

'Thank God for that, anyway,' was Devine's last shot. Then they screwed themselves in.

Ransom went at once to the lower side of the sphere, into the chamber which was now most completely upside down, and stretched himself on what would later become its skylight. He was surprised to find that they were already thousands of feet up. The handramit was only a straight purple line across the rose-red surface of the harandra. They were above the junction of two handramits. One of them was doubtless that in which

he had lived, the other that which contained Meldilorn. The gully by which he had cut off the corner between the two, on Augray's shoulders, was quite invisible.

Each minute more handramits came into view - long straight lines, some parallel, some intersecting, some building triangles. The landscape became increasingly geometrical. The waste between the purple lines appeared perfectly flat. The rosy colour of the petrified forests accounted for its tint immediately below him; but to the north and east the great sand deserts of which the sorns had told him were now appearing as illimitable stretches of yellow and ochre. To the west a huge discoloration began to show. It was an irregular patch of greenish blue that looked as if it were sunk below the level of the surrounding harandra. He concluded it was the forest lowland of the pfiltriggi - or rather one of their forest lowlands, for now similar patches were appearing in all directions, some of them mere blobs at the intersection of handramits, some of vast extent. He became vividly conscious that his knowledge of Malacandra was minute, local, parochial. It was as if a sorn had journeyed forty million miles to the Earth and spent his stay there between Worthing and Brighton. He reflected that he would have very little to show for his amazing voyage if he survived it: a smattering of the language, a few landscapes, some half-understood physics - but where were the statistics, the history, the broad survey of extra-terrestrial conditions, which such a traveller ought to bring back? Those handramits, for example. Seen from the height which the space-ship had now attained, in all their unmistakable geometry, they put to shame his original impression that they were natural valleys. There were gigantic feats of engineering, about which he had learned nothing; feats accomplished, if all were true, before human history began... before animal history began. Or was that only mythology? He knew it would seem like mythology when he got back to Earth (if he ever got back), but the presence of Oyarsa was still too fresh a memory to allow him any real doubts. It even occurred to him

that the distinction between history and mythology might be itself meaningless outside the Earth.

The thought baffled him, and he turned again to the landscape below - the landscape which became every moment less of a landscape and more of a diagram. By this time, to the east, a much larger and darker patch of discoloration than he had yet seen was pushing its way into the reddish ochre of the Malacandrian world - a curiously shaped patch with long arms or horns extended on each side and a sort of bay between them, like the concave side of a crescent. It grew and grew. The wide dark arms seemed to be spread out to engulf the whole planet. Suddenly he saw a bright point of light in the middle of this dark patch and realized that it was not a patch on the surface of the planet at all, but the black sky showing behind her. The smooth curve was the edge of her disk. At this, for the first time since their embarkation, fear took hold of him. Slowly, yet not too slowly for him to see, the dark arms spread farther and even farther round the lighted surface till at last they met. The whole disk, framed in blackness, was before him. The faint percussions of the meteorites had long been audible; the window through which he was gazing was no longer definitely beneath him. His limbs, though already very light, were almost too stiff to move, and he was very hungry. He looked at his watch. He had been at his post, spellbound, for nearly eight hours.

He made his way with difficulty to the sunward side of the ship and reeled back almost blinded with the glory of the light. Groping, he found his darkened glasses in his old cabin and got himself food and water: Weston had rationed them strictly in both. He opened the door of the control room and looked in. Both the partners, their faces drawn with anxiety, were seated before a kind of metal table; it was covered with delicate, gently vibrating instruments in which crystal and fine wire were the predominant

materials. Both ignored his presence. For the rest of the silent journey, he was free of the whole ship.

When he returned to the dark side, the world they were leaving hung in the star-strewn sky not much bigger than our earthly moon. Its colours were still visible - a reddish-yellow disk blotched with greenish blue and capped with white at the poles. He saw the two tiny Malacandrian moons - their movement quite perceptible - and reflected that they were among the thousand things he had not noticed during his sojourn there. He slept, and woke, and saw the disk still hanging in the sky. It was smaller than the Moon now. Its colours were gone except for a faint, uniform tinge of redness in its light; even the light was not now incomparably stronger than that of the countless stars which surrounded it. It had ceased to be Malacandra; it was only Mars.

He soon fell back into the old routine of sleeping and basking, punctuated with the making of some scribbled notes for his Malacandrian dictionary. He knew that there was very little chance of his being able to communicate his new knowledge to man, that unrecorded death in the depth of space would almost certainly be the end of their adventure. But already it had become impossible to think of it as 'space'. Some moments of cold fear he had; but each time they were shorter and more quickly swallowed up in a sense of awe which made his personal fate seem wholly insignificant. He could not feel that they were an island of life journeying through an abyss of death. He felt almost the opposite - that life was waiting outside the little iron eggshell in which they rode, ready at any moment to break in, and that, if it killed them, it would kill them by excess of its vitality. He hoped passionately that if they were to perish, they would perish by the 'unbodying' of the space-ship and not by suffocation within it. To be let out, to be set free, to dissolve into the ocean of eternal noon, seemed to him at certain moments a consummation even more desirable than their return

to Earth. And if he had felt some such lift of the heart when first he passed through heaven on their outward journey, he felt it now tenfold, for now he was convinced that the abyss was full of life in the most literal sense, full of living creatures.

His confidence in Oyarsa's words about the eldila increased rather than diminished as they went on. He saw none of them; the intensity of light in which the ship swam allowed none of the fugitive variations which would have betrayed their presence. But he heard, or thought he heard, all kinds of delicate sound, or vibrations akin to sound, mixed with the tinkling rain of meteorites, and often the sense of unseen presences even within the space-ship became irresistible. It was this, more than anything else, that made his own chances of life seem so unimportant. He and all his race showed small and ephemeral against a background of such immeasurable fullness. His brain reeled at the thought of the true population of the universe, the three-dimensional infinitude of their territory, and the unchronicled aeons of their past; but his heart became steadier than it had ever been.

It was well for him that he had reached this frame of mind before the real hardships of their journey began. Ever since their departure from Malacandra, the thermometer had steadily risen; now it was higher than it had stood at any time on their outward journey. And still it rose. The light also increased. Under his glasses he kept his eyes habitually tight shut, opening them only for the shortest time for necessary movements. He knew that if he reached Earth it would be with permanently damaged sight. But all this was nothing to the torment of heat. All three of them were awake for twenty-four hours out of the twenty-four, enduring with dilated eyeballs, blackened lips and froth-flecked cheeks the agony of thirst. It would be madness to increase their scanty rations of water madness even to consume air in discussing the question.

He saw well enough what was happening. In his last bid for life Weston was venturing inside the Earth's orbit, leading them nearer the Sun than man, perhaps than life, had ever been. Presumably this was unavoidable; one could not follow a retreating Earth round the rim of its own wheeling course. They must be trying to meet it to cut across... it was madness! But the question did not much occupy his mind; it was not possible for long to think of anything but thirst. One thought of water; then one thought of thirst; then one thought of thinking of thirst; then of water again. And still the thermometer rose. The walls of the ship were too hot to touch. It was obvious that a crisis was approaching. In the next few hours it must kill them or get less.

It got less. There came a time when they lay exhausted and shivering in what seemed the cold, though it was still hotter than any terrestrial climate.

Weston had so far succeeded; he had risked the highest temperature at which human life could theoretically survive, and they had lived through it. But they were not the same men. Hitherto Weston had slept very little even in his watches off; always, after an hour or so of uneasy rest, he had returned to his charts and to his endless, almost despairing, calculations. You could see him fighting the despair - pinning his terrified brain down, and again down, to the figures. Now he never looked at them. He even seemed careless in the control room. Devine moved and looked like a somnambulist. Ransom lived increasingly on the dark side and for long hours he thought of nothing. Although the first great danger was past, none of them, at this time, had any serious hope of a successful issue to their journey. They had now been fifty days, without speech, in their steel shell, and the air was already very bad.

Weston was so unlike his old self that he even allowed Ransom to take his share in the navigation. Mainly by signs, but with the help of a few whispered words, he taught him all that was necessary at this stage of the

journey. Apparently, they were racing home - but with little chance of reaching it in time - before some sort of cosmic 'trade-wind'. A few rules of thumb enabled Ransom to keep the star which Weston pointed out to him in its position at the centre of the skylight, but always with his left hand on the bell to Weston's cabin.

This star was not the Earth. The days - the purely theoretical 'days' which bore such a desperately practical meaning for the travelers - mounted to fifty-eight before Weston changed course, and a different luminary was in the centre. Sixty days, and it was visibly a planet. Sixty-six, and it was like a planet seen through field-glasses. Seventy, and it was like nothing that Ransom had ever seen - a little dazzling disk too large for a planet and far too small for the Moon. Now that he was navigating, his celestial mood was shattered. Wild, animal thirst for life, mixed with homesick longing for the free airs and the sights and smells of earth - for grass and meat and beer and tea and the human voice - awoke in him. At first his chief difficulty on watch had been to resist drowsiness; now, though the air was worse, feverish excitement kept him vigilant. Often when he came off duty he found his right arm stiff and sore; for hours he had been pressing it unconsciously against the control board as if his puny thrust could spur the space-ship to yet greater speed.

Now they had twenty days to go. Nineteen - eighteen - and on the white terrestrial disk, now a little larger than a sixpence, he thought he could make out Australia and the south-east corner of Asia. Hour after hour, though the markings moved slowly across the disk with the Earth's diurnal revolution, the disk itself refused to grow larger. 'Get on! Get on! Ransom muttered to the ship. Now ten days were left and it was like the Moon and so bright that they could not look steadily at it. The air in their little sphere was ominously bad, but Ransom and Devine risked a whisper as they changed watches.

'We'll do it,' they said. 'We'll do it yet.'

On the eighty-seventh day, when Ransom relieved Devine, he thought there was something wrong with the Earth. Before his watch was done, he was sure. It was no longer a true circle, but bulging a little on one side; it was almost pear-shaped. When Weston came on duty he gave one glance at the skylight, rang furiously on the bell for Devine, thrust Ransom aside, and took the navigating seat. His face was the colour of putty. He seemed to be about to do something to the controls, but as Devine entered the room he looked up and shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of despair. Then he buried his face in his hands and laid his head down on the control board.

Ransom and Devine exchanged glances. They bundled Weston out of the seat - he was crying like a child - and Devine took his place. And now at last Ransom understood the mystery of the bulging Earth. What had appeared as a bulge on one side of her disk was becoming increasingly distinct as a second disk, a disk almost as large in appearance as her own. It was covering more than half of the Earth. It was the Moon between them and the Earth, and two hundred and forty thousand miles nearer. Ransom did not know what fate this might mean for the space-ship. Devine obviously did, and never had he appeared so admirable. His face was as pale as Weston's, but his eyes were clear and preternaturally bright; he sat crouched over the controls like an animal, about to spring and he was whistling very softly between his teeth.

Hours later Ransom understood what was happening. The Moon's disk was now larger than the Earth's, and very gradually it became apparent to him that both disks were diminishing in size. 'The space-ship was no longer approaching either the Earth or the Moon; it was farther away from them than it had been half an hour ago, and that was the meaning of Devine's feverish activity with the controls. It was not merely that the Moon was crossing their path and cutting them off from the Earth; apparently for

some reason probably gravitational - it was dangerous to get too close to the Moon, and Devine was standing off into space. In sight of harbour they were being forced to turn back to the open sea. He glanced up at the chronometer. It was the morning of the eighty-eighth day. Two days to make the Earth, and they were moving away from her.

'I suppose this finishes us?' he whispered.

'Expect so,' whispered Devine, without looking round. Weston presently recovered sufficiently to come back and stand beside Devine. There was nothing for Ransom to do. He was sure, now, that they were soon to die. With this realization, the agony of his suspense suddenly disappeared. Death, whether it came now or some thirty years later on earth, rose up and claimed his attention. There are preparations a man likes to make. He left the control room and returned into one of the sunward chambers, into the indifference of the moveless light, the warmth, the silence and the sharp-cut shadows. Nothing was farther from his mind than sleep. It must have been the exhausted atmosphere which made him drowsy. He slept.

He awoke in almost complete darkness in the midst of a loud continuous noise, which he could not at first identify. It reminded him of something - something he seemed to have heard in a previous existence. It was a prolonged drumming noise close above his head. Suddenly his heart gave a great leap.

'Oh God,' he sobbed. 'Oh God! It's rain.'

He was on Earth. The air was heavy and stale about him, but the choking sensations he had been suffering were gone. He realized that he was still in the space-ship. The others, in fear of its threatened 'unbodying', had characteristically abandoned it the moment it touched Earth and left him to his fate. It was difficult in the dark, and under the crushing weight of terrestrial gravity, to find his way out. But he managed it. He found the

manhole and slithered, drinking great draughts of air, down the outside of the sphere; slipped in mud, blessed the smell of it, and at last raised the unaccustomed weight of his body to its feet. He stood in pitch-black night under torrential rain. With every pore of his body he drank it in; with every desire of his heart he embraced the smell of the field about him - a patch of his native planet where grass grew, where cows moved, where presently he would come to hedges and a gate.

He had walked about half an hour when a vivid light behind him and a strong, momentary wind informed him that the space-ship was no more. He felt very little interest. He had seen dim lights, the lights of men, ahead. He contrived to get into a lane, then into a road, then into a village street. A lighted door was open. There were voices from within and they were speaking English. There was a familiar smell. He pushed his way in, regardless of the surprise he was creating, and walked to the bar.

'A pint of bitter, please,' said Ransom.

## Chapter 22

AT THIS point, if I were guided by purely literary considerations, my story would end, but it is time to remove the mask and to acquaint the reader with the real and practical purpose for which this book has been written. At the same time he will learn how the writing of it became possible at all.

Dr Ransom - and at this stage it will become obvious that this is not his real name - soon abandoned the idea of his Malacandrian dictionary and indeed all idea of communicating his story to the world. He was ill for several months, and when he recovered he found himself in considerable doubt as to whether what he remembered had really occurred. It looked very like a delusion produced by his illness, and most of his apparent adventures could, he saw, be explained psycho-analytically. He did not lean very heavily

on this fact himself, for he had long since observed that a good many 'real' things in the fauna and flora of our own world could be accounted for in the same way if you started with the assumption that they were illusions. But he felt that if he himself half doubted his own story, the rest of the world would disbelieve it completely. He decided to hold his tongue, and there the matter would have rested but for a very curious coincidence.

This is where I come into the story. I had known Dr Ransom slightly for several years and corresponded with him on literary and philological subjects, though we very seldom met. It was, therefore, quite in the usual order of things that I should write a letter some months ago, of which I will quote the relevant paragraph. It ran like this:

'I am now working at the Platonists of the twelfth century and incidentally discovering that they wrote damnably difficult Latin. In one of them, Bernardus Silvestris, there is a word I should particularly like your views on - the word Oyarses. It occurs in the description of a voyage through the heavens, and an Oyarses seems to be the 'intelligence' or tutelary spirit of a heavenly sphere, i.e. in our language, of a planet. I asked C. J. about it and he says it ought to be Ousiarches. That, of course, would make sense, but I do not feel quite satisfied. Have you by any chance ever come across a word like Oyarses, or can you hazard any guess as to what language it may be?'

The immediate result of this letter was an invitation to spend a weekend with Dr Ransom. He told me his whole story, and since then he and I have been almost continuously at work on the mystery. A good many facts, which I have no intention of publishing at present; have fallen into our hands; facts about planets in general and about Mars in particular, facts about medieval Platonists, and (not least in importance) facts about the Professor to whom I am giving the fictitious name of Weston: A systematic report of these facts might, of course, be given to the civilized world: but that would almost certainly result in universal incredulity and in a libel action from 'Weston'.

At the same time, we both feel that we cannot be silent. We are being daily confirmed in our belief that the oyses of Mars was right when it said that the present 'celestial year' was to be a revolutionary one, that the long isolation of our own planet is nearing its end, and that great doings are on foot. We have found reason to believe that the medieval Platonists were living in the same celestial year as ourselves - in fact, that it began in the twelfth century of our era - and that the occurrence of the name Oyarsa (Latinized as oyarses) in Bernardus Silvestris is not an accident. And we have also evidence -increasing almost daily - that 'Weston', or the force or forces behind 'Weston', will play a very important part in the events of the next few centuries, and, unless we prevent them, a very disastrous one. We do not mean that they are likely to invade Mars - our cry is not merely 'Hands off Malacandra.' The dangers to be feared are not planetary but cosmic, or at least solar, and they are not temporal but eternal. More than this it would be unwise to say.

It was Dr Ransom who first saw that our only chance was to publish in the form of fiction what would certainly not be listened to as fact. He even thought - greatly overrating my literary powers - that this might have the incidental advantage of reaching a wider public, and that, certainly, it would reach a great many people sooner than 'Weston'. To my objection that if accepted as fiction, it would for that very reason be regarded as false, he replied that there would be indications enough in the narrative for the few readers - the very few - who at present were prepared to go farther into the matter.

'And they,' he said, 'will easily find out you, or me, and will easily identify Weston. Anyway,' he continued, 'what we need for the moment is not so much a body of belief as a body of people familiarized with certain ideas. If we could even affect one per cent of our readers to change-over from the

conception of Space to the conception of Heaven, we should have made a beginning.'

What neither of us foresaw was the rapid march of events which was to render the book out of date before it was published. These events have already made it rather a prologue to our story than the story itself. But we must let it go as it stands. For the later stages of the adventure - well, it was Aristotle, long before Kipling, who taught us the formula, 'That is another story.'

