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## Letters: A Narnian Clarification

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## Letters: A Narnian Clarification

### Abstract

Responds to a critique that his *Planet Narnia* thesis does not take into account Lewis's letter to Laurence Kreig; explains his "incremental plan" hypothesis.

### Additional Keywords

Lewis, C.S. *Chronicles of Narnia*; Lewis, C.S. Letter to Laurence Kreig, 1957; Ward, Michael. *Planet Narnia*

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## LETTERS

### A NARNIAN CLARIFICATION

MICHAEL WARD

IN HIS REVIEW OF *THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO C.S. LEWIS* (*Mythlore* 29.3/4, #113/114), Gregory Bassham writes about Alan Jacobs's discussion of my book, *Planet Narnia*, to which the Mythopoeic Society kindly assigned its 2011 award for scholarship in Inklings studies. Dr. Bassham cautions readers to "take a long, hard look before embracing Ward's thesis." I welcome his skepticism, because the *Planet Narnia* thesis does indeed require some concentrated re-thinkings of accepted approaches to Lewis's imaginative strategies in the Narniad. The arguments I mount are detailed and invite careful attention to the evidence adduced.

Dr. Bassham writes:

Curiously, Jacobs notes one massive problem with Ward's reading—a 1957 letter in which Lewis told an American boy [Laurence Krieg] that when he wrote *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, he didn't plan to write any more Narnia stories (269). How, then, could Lewis have had a secret plan to encode esoteric astrological correspondences in each of the seven books? Did he lie to the boy, or forget a few short years later how the books came to be written? Neither explanation is likely. (180)

I agree that neither explanation is likely. However, these two explanations don't exhaust the options. On page 5 of *Planet Narnia* another option is canvassed: that Lewis's plan to embody and express the planetary archetypes within the Narnia Chronicles was "an incremental plan, for we know that he did not have the whole series of seven books mapped out when he began to write the first."

It is a point returned to in Chapter 10 of *Planet Narnia*:

[T]he case that I have advanced in this chapter helps explain why Lewis should have started out with the intention of writing just one book. He had not originally conceived the idea of a series that would enable him to portray all seven planets; rather, he had found a way of reimagining *Miracles* using the imagery of Jupiter, because Jupiter's kingly aspect was especially associated with the ideas he had expressed in *Miracles* and because Jupiter was, in any case, his favourite planet, part of the 'habitual furniture' of his mind, out of which he believed an author should write. *The Lion* was thus the first example of that "'idea that he wanted to try out" [as he said to Charles Wrong]. *Prince Caspian* and *The 'Dawn Treader'* naturally followed because Mars and Sol were both already connected in his mind with the merits of the Alexander technique [of getting readers to 'look along' a qualitative literary atmosphere]. Even after completing *The 'Dawn Treader'* Lewis had not decided to write seven stories (according to his letter to Laurence Krieg), but at some point after commencing *The Horse and His Boy* he resolved to treat all seven planets, for seven such treatments of his idea would mean that he had 'worked it out to the full' [as, again, Lewis said in conversation with Charles Wrong].

While my hypothesis of "an incremental plan" may not convince all readers, it does take Lewis's letter to Laurence Krieg into account. As for whether the overall argument is plausible or not, I can only echo Dr. Bassham and encourage readers of *Mythlore* to take a long, hard look before making up their own minds.

Yours truly,  
Michael Ward

