



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,  
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

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Volume 25  
Number 1

Article 8

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10-15-2006

## Playing by the Rules: Kipling's "Great Game" vs. "The Great Dance" in C.S. Lewis's Space Trilogy

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### Recommended Citation

Hooper, Teresa (2006) "Playing by the Rules: Kipling's "Great Game" vs. "The Great Dance" in C.S. Lewis's Space Trilogy," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 25 : No. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol25/iss1/8>

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## Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



### Abstract

Shows C.S. Lewis in dialogue with Rudyard Kipling about the themes of the Great Game and the Inner Circle, which Lewis resolves in the resonant image of the Great Dance.

### Additional Keywords

Kipling, Rudyard. Kim; Lewis, C.S. Space Trilogy (Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, That Hideous Strength)

**Playing by the Rules:  
Kipling's "Great Game" vs. "The Great Dance"  
in C. S. Lewis's Space Trilogy**

**Teresa Hooper**

From his young adulthood until his old age, C. S. Lewis had a deep appreciation of Kipling's work. His letters as a young university student occasionally revealed this passion: "W. [Warren Lewis] had just been reading *Puck of Pook's Hill* [...] he praised it highly and I agreed with him" (*Letters* 195). Four decades later, shortly before his death, he wrote to Magdalene college concerning his honorary fellowship that "If I loved you all less I should think much of being thus placed ('so were I equall'd with them in renown') beside Kipling and Eliot" (*Letters* 509).

Lewis often shared his appreciation of Kipling with others, and even appropriated Kipling's style in some of his own work. He once wrote to his brother Warren, "I know hardly any poet who can deliver such a *hammer stroke*. The stories [...] are, I suppose, even now admitted to be good by all except a handful of Left idiots . . ." (*Letters* 332). He also may have taken the name of his skeptic MacPhee from Kipling's short story, "Bread Upon the Waters": in that narrative, an incredulous ship operator (MacPhee) has to suspend his own judgment and blindly follow a fool's course in order to see justice done. Kipling's influence upon his writings also extends into the Space Trilogy. In his 1948 address, "Kipling's World," Lewis called Kipling "first and foremost the poet of work" ("Kipling's World" [KW] 235); when trying to capture the language and feel of the work of Bracton College and Belbury, Lewis appears to use Kipling as a model. Ransom's kidnappers in *Out of the Silent Planet*, Weston and Devine, both speak in clichés culled from Kipling's stories.<sup>1</sup> Martin Green also places Lewis in

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<sup>1</sup> Devine's comment about the "White Man's Burden" (OSP 15) refers to a poem by Kipling with the same title; his other comment about "A Straight Bat," as a reference to cricket and fair play, also has use in Kipling (Green 274). Weston's contemptuous remark about "copy-book maxims" (OSP 135), even as he speaks in them, has an extensive use in Kipling's *Stalky and Co.* (Green 273-4).

context with several other authors who "rediscovered" Kipling at about the same time, including T.S. Eliot, Desmond McCarthy, and George Orwell (Green 281-82).<sup>2</sup>

Yet, despite this longstanding admiration for Kipling's stories and poetry, Lewis is more ambivalent concerning Kipling's content. For all the qualities Lewis celebrates in Kipling's stories, his support wavers sharply between breathless adulation and a distaste bordering on nausea: "I mean a real disenchantment, a recoil which makes the whole Kipling world, for the moment [...] unendurable—a heavy, glaring, suffocating monstrosity" (KW 232). As he further explains, Kipling's style and ability to capture the world of work is admirable (235), but Kipling himself never questions the purpose of brutality inside that system of work. Lewis's criticism of "The Centaurs" provides a convenient example: "It is all very well that the colts [...] should learn to obey Chiron [...] but how if Chiron wants their obedience only to send them to the knacker's yard?" (240). He also claims that Kipling elevates the "inner circle" almost to the point of idolatry: "[Kipling] is the slave of the Inner Ring; he expresses the passion, but does not stand outside to criticise it" (248). Lewis's reservations about Kipling's fiction may have given him the inspiration for two major themes in the Space Trilogy: several characters see themselves involved in subterfuge much like Kim's "Great Game," and also find themselves caught in an "Inner Ring." Lewis refutes these two concepts from Kipling with a majestic cosmic doctrine of obedience he calls "the Great Dance."

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<sup>2</sup> While Green helpfully brings these critics together in his book, I believe that his approach concerning Lewis to be a little misguided; he states concerning Lewis, "But a few years later C.S. Lewis 'discovered' that imaginative literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries omitted, or thrust into the background, what occupies men most, their work, and that Kipling was the poet of work" (282). While the statement itself is accurate concerning Lewis's essay, he fails to mention that Lewis spends almost two-thirds of his essay in criticism of Kipling. He also claims, "But it is significant that the rediscoveries are often announced in exactly the same terms—each critic starts by assuming a general prejudice against Kipling; the previous critic's works has disappeared each time" (281). In reference to Lewis, at least, Green overlooks the fact that Lewis uses his own occasional prejudice against Kipling as his starting point, and ignores the fact that Lewis both cites and footnotes Eliot's preface in his own essay (280).

## The Great Game and The Inner Ring

“The Great Game,” as it was called by its members, was a covert attempt starting in 1865 to map and claim as much of India’s uncharted northern region as quickly as possible by training native Indians for the task (Baucom 351). Working for the British colonial government under Thomas Montgomerie, these forces worked in competition with similarly trained Russian cartographers moving in from the North. As described in Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, these men, acting as itinerant surveyors, secret agents and diplomats rolled together, worked under a constant threat of discovery at the hands of both their Russian adversaries and Indian officials who were opposed to their presence. Kim, who cares little for the larger purpose of his work, sees the Great Game as a vast opportunity for adventure and a chance to put the skills he learned while a street urchin in the Punjab to work to his own advantage.

That “game,” as described by Kim and his patron Mahbub Ali, is a dance of danger and skill performed on the outskirts of established authority; Chris Ann Matteo states,

In its most general definition, a game may be thought of as a system of provisional rules which, with the consent of the players, define reality during the duration of play [...]. The game is, in one sense, rigid in its restrictions, yet, in another sense, it is elastic and resilient insofar as it is temporary and voluntary. (Matteo 166)

In some ways, Kipling’s game is very similar to this description: it operates self-consciously outside the established law in its own realm of reality. It is therefore extremely flexible in regards to the reality of law outside of itself. In some ways, however, it is not a game at all; the rules are not at all provisional, and the players cannot call off the duration of play. Hurree Babu tells Kim, “When everyone is dead the Great Game is finished. Not before” (Kipling 185). This game has no obligations except to itself, shows no partiality, and gives no protection to its players. The players usually enter the game without knowing that they have done so. Kim, for example, has been playing the Game for several months already when he tells Hurree Babu he wishes to join (Kipling 185). Matteo also points out this trait of the game: “The players or volunteers in the Great Game are seduced to consent or bullied through coercion” (168).

This game, then, places a certain set of contradictions upon its players: first, they are expected to avoid the established rule of law at all costs—yet both the Game and the government it subverts operate under the rule of the British Empire. These seemingly irreconcilable systems of law are therefore, in a sense, brothers. Those who play the Game are independent operators who stay aloof from any form of control, but the game has complete control over every aspect of their lives. They act as extreme individualists, yet they have had even their names stripped from them by the British Survey Office. As such, they may operate on the fringes of their former society, but they are bound completely to the new brotherhood of the Sat Bhai. There is very little difference, in fact, in the amount of restriction one faces in either of the two societal systems; the only difference is that the Great Game provides its players with none of personal safeguards or physical protection that the religions and laws of India provide freely.

One can see how the increasing control of the Game nearly destroys Kim. At first, the essence of Kim's character lies in a delightful defiance of the law; puckish and harmlessly devious, he tries to be a neutral operator in a society that attempts to polarize every person by caste, religion or nationality. Kim does not blur the distinctions of race and religion so much as he co-opts them for his own benefit, sliding into Hindu, Pashtun or British clothes and tongue as he sees fit. He is also essentially amoral and self-seeking, but operates out of a vague sense of good. He spends his entire life choosing sides, shifting positions, and guardedly trying to stay aloof from all restrictions.

When he wants to use these skills to become a player of the game, he has to leave that life completely behind for the increasingly intense demands of the Game. Zoreh T. Sullivan points out, "[...] though he is most afraid of being alone and isolated from his life in the native bazaars, [he] commits actions that progressively alienate him from the group of natives with whom he has enjoyed an easy camaraderie" (444). That idea may be best seen in his change of titles: while he is the "Friend of All the World" at the start of the novel, he increasingly alienates himself from others with his intrigues, becoming instead the lofty but lonely "Friend of the Stars."

Kim increasingly chooses the game over all his other important relationships; he lies to the lama and even unwittingly puts the old man's life in danger: "Although Kim creates the illusion of a free spirit,

attachments far outweigh his autonomy. Even his deception of the lama seems forgivable because of his repeated declarations of love" (Sullivan 445). Kim changes from a child with his own identity to a chameleon who can wrap his soul around any person in India, yet he constantly asks himself, "I am Kim. I am Kim. And what is Kim?" (Kipling 234). While the lama thinks he has found escape from the Wheel, "Kim has been transformed from a youthful, reckless, happy adventurer into a cog in the imperialist wheel" (Sullivan 448). The game leaves him feeling spiritually and physically drained, but even at the end of the journey he cannot choose to leave it in the face of lama's offer of spiritual freedom.

Several characters in the Space Trilogy play a version of the Great Game; instead of operating both in and out of Colonial law, these characters play dangerously on the outskirts of Divine Law, attempting to work apart from a society polarized into factions of Good and Evil. While they do not necessarily play the Game for personal glory, like Kim's desire to have a price on his head, they do play it as a means to circumvent the commandments of God. There is, however, even less freedom for those who play Lewis's version of the Game: if a character chooses to live outside of God's will, they instead work for His enemies whether they realize it or not. One cannot avoid ministering to God without serving devils.

Weston is a perfect example of someone who plays this new, more perilous game: he travels millions of miles and puts his life at stake for his belief in a vaguely Darwinist preservation of humanity. He also willingly breaks every rule for the sake of promoting the one ideal he deems the greatest "Good." In the novel *Perelandra*, Weston asks Ransom, "Can you not even conceive a total commitment—a commitment to something which utterly overrides all our petty ethical pigeon-holes?" (*Perelandra* 95). Beneath his solemn moralizing about his love for humanity lies a man preoccupied with staying one jump ahead of God's will in order to promote his own agenda.

In *Out of the Silent Planet*, Oyarsa tells Weston that God intended that no species should last forever. Weston, however, has devoted his life's work to the express purpose of helping humanity avoid extinction; he hopes that mankind can usurp planets one at a time, moving to the next planet before God allows their home planet to die (*Out of the Silent Planet* [OSP] 39). Through this game of cosmic hopscotch, Weston hopes that Man as a group can achieve some sort of immortality in this fashion and circumvent God's

divine will. Oyarsa bluntly informs him that his plan is doomed to fail, but Weston stubbornly rejects the rule of Law and even takes sides with Satan's survivalist instinct: "Other one, Bent one, he fight, jump, live—not all talkee-talkee. Me no care Maleldil. Like Bent One better: me on his side" (*OSP* 139). Weston may think he is free to pursue his own aims, but deep down, even he understands that to avoid God's will is to serve the Devil's.

Upon becoming what Ransom calls the "Un-Man" on Perelandra, Weston tries to recruit the young Lady of Venus to play a version of the Game with God, but he couches her disobedience in terms of a "Great Risk" for her husband and unborn children. Ransom envisions the Risk in his mind: "the tall, slender form, unbowed though the world's weight rested upon its shoulders, stepping forth fearless and friendless in the dark to do for others what those others forbade it to do yet needed to have done" (*Perelandra* 126). That image is not unlike Kim and the other surveyors, working in secret so that the British government can subvert the laws and governments she obeys on the surface. Likewise, the N.I.C.E. in *That Hideous Strength* is devoted to accomplishing outside the law what the law cannot do for itself; Belbury serves the same purpose as the Healer of Sick Pearls, giving its members the tools needed to subvert the law in order to aid those whom they serve.

Weston's money-hungry partner Devine also plays a version of the Game, but he plays for personal gain rather than a set of lofty ideals. When Devine travels to Mars with Weston, he makes it very clear that he supports Weston's scientific exploits for reasons of personal gain: "He didn't give a damn, he said, for the future of the species [...]. [O]cean-going yachts, the most expensive women and a big place on the Riviera figured largely in his plans. 'I'm not running all these risks for fun'" (*OSP* 32-33). Back on Earth and renamed the Lord Feverstone, Devine plays his simultaneous positions in the College and Belbury against one another for personal benefit; by playing both sides against the middle, he gains a considerable amount of personal power at the expense of both institutions. Devine's description of himself is suspiciously like Kim's, but minus the amoral goodness:

He was neither an initiate like Wither nor a dupe like Filostrato. He knew about the Macrobes, but it wasn't the sort of thing he was interested in. [...] He had a dozen lines of retreat kept open. He had also a perfectly clear conscience and had played no tricks with his mind. He had never slandered another man except to get his job, never cheated except because



he wanted money, never really disliked people unless they bored him. [...] Danger—in moderation—acted on him like a tonic. (*That Hideous Strength* [THS] 356).

Hurree Babu claims that the Great Game ends when all the players are dead. A similar rule follows at Belbury: when the Game ends, so do its players. As Ransom puts it, “upon them He a spirit of frenzy sent To call in haste for their destroyer.” [...] The moment we disable the human pawns enough to make them useless to Hell, their own Masters finish the work for us. They break their tools” (THS 317). Once the power of the Institute is broken, each member perishes through their work at the Institute. Filostrato devotes his life’s work to the Head of the Institute; that same head orders his execution. Frost, who tries so hard to deny his own existence, sets himself on fire to destroy the self he denied was ever there. Feverstone, most appropriately, spends his entire life in defiance against the entire world, pillaging and destroying the world around him to serve his own purposes. Almost in response, the earth rises up and swallows him whole.

Lewis next tackles his problem with Inner Rings in *That Hideous Strength*. In his essay “The Inner Ring,” Lewis describes it as an unofficial association of people which operates to the detriment of those on the outside. The main purpose of the Inner Ring is to make people conscious of its boundaries—whether one is “in” or “out” of the clique: “The invisible line would have no meaning unless most people were on the wrong side of it. Exclusion is no accident; it is the essence” (“The Inner Ring” [“Ring”] 156). Kipling’s own interest in the Inner Ring, Lewis says, is connected to the feeling of camaraderie which exclusion creates: “To belong, to be inside, to be in the know, to be snugly together against the outsiders—that is what really matters” (KW 246). Lewis also claims that the Inner Ring can be used for evil: “The spirit of the Inner Ring is morally neutral—the obedient servant of valour and public spirit, but equally of cruelty, extortion, oppression and dishonesty” (KW 248).

Kim also shows this same desire to be in the middle of anything exclusive or important; the Game itself, his education at Lucknow and even his status as a Sahib are exclusive societies that exist solely for the elite, and at the expense of the excluded. Kim wants to be in those societies to elicit the awe and admiration of those who are on the outside of that affiliation. He joins the Lama in his search for the River out of some sort of sympathy

for the old man, but Kim follows him initially because he wanted the privilege and recognition of being his *chela*. When Kim delivers the "pedigree of the white stallion" to the man in Umballa, he listens from the outside to their war preparations, desiring to be "in" on their intrigues. Mahbub Ali then sponsors his initiation into a special part of the Ethnological Survey called the Sat Bhai and becomes a member of this set as a "son of the Charm" (154). This desire to live the lives of these men, and "have a price on his head" leads him to tell Hurree Babu, "[...] I hope to play the Great Game" (185).

Kim plays for similar stakes when he disguises his fellow player E23 as a Saddhu on the train; like his evening of playing the prophet, he gets sense of thrill out of confounding the local police and the other people sitting in his car (172). Kim has an inordinate preoccupation with membership and exclusivity: for instance, before meeting Lurgan Sahib, Kim tries to assert his own membership in the ring: "'is he by chance'—he lowered his voice—'one of us?'" (125). He asks the same of Hurree (137) and even of E23 on the train carriage (175). Even the Masonic Lodge papers which Kim carries around his neck privilege him to exclusive societies unattainable by other boys of the same background, and usher him into the society of the Sahibs.

Except for the occasional admonition from the lama, Kipling never really condemns Kim's desire to join the Inner Ring—even when the Game endangers the Lama's life and alienates Kim from the Indian society he loves. Kipling instead praises the qualities that lead Kim to his incredible adventures. In an imitation of the society described in the Simla stories of Kipling, Lewis creates the social aura of the N.I.C.E. in terms of "a provincial smart set which plays frivolously with men's careers and even their lives. The system is rotten at the head" (KW 241). When a marginal member of the society named Mark Studdock enters their social circle, the N.I.C.E. interferes with his personal life and causes him to lose his Bracton post; when he later threatens to leave, they frame him for murder and arrange for an extra-judicial execution. Ultimately, Lewis shows us that Inner Rings of this sort are not just "rotten at the head"; when Studdock follows this set of Inner Rings to its center, he finds a satanic core.

Lewis reveals no fewer than eight different Rings affecting Studdock's personality. Of those eight, two are previous to the plot of the

novel; the other six are tied in some way to the Institute at Belbury.<sup>3</sup> When the third novel opens, Studdock already is a member of the first clique, called the "Progressive Element" of Bracton College; it is a loose association of Modernistic professors who control the school's policies behind closed doors in a fashion strikingly similar to Hurree Babu, who takes care of internal problems "demi-offeentially" though the Ethnological Survey (Kipling 155, 187). His initiation into their club does not come without sacrifice; in order to be accepted by Feverstone, Curry and others, Mark drops his previous friendship with Arthur Denniston and starts backbiting people not in the favor with his new circle.

Yet, the moment Mark becomes comfortable within this clique, he experiences a peculiar aspect of the Inner Ring he had never before noticed: "The rainbow's end will still be ahead of you. The old Ring will now only be the drab background for your endeavour to enter a new one" ("Ring" 155). In response, Mark simply holds out for the next ring: "one could not expect to be in the interesting set at once; there would be better things later on" (*THS* 88). When he talks to Feverstone at the College meeting, he discovers through Feverstone's contempt for the other members of the Progressive Element that a more exclusive set, the N.I.C.E., exists beyond his own in Bracton College (39). He immediately sets out, with Feverstone's invitation, to enter this newer and more exclusive membership.

Located at Belbury, this second Ring is an exclusive club of scientists and public servants dedicated to directing the path of their society outside its own rules; the N.I.C.E. does for all of England what the Sat Bhai did for the British Crown, and what the Progressive Element did within Bracton. Mark immediately searches about for the inner clique of this new society, finds it in John Wither, and starts working in the Sociology department of the Institute. The corrupting influence of the Institute immediately begins to change his personality; Mark starts drinking more or less constantly and even lies to his wife. Yet, even here, he suspects that another inner Ring exists even further in the Institute: he tells his wife, "he had already got onto the people there. Wither and Miss Hardcastle are the ones that mattered" (*THS* 89).

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<sup>3</sup> The other two Rings are a childhood clique called "Grip" (*THS* 246), and Studdock's fellowship at Bracton, which he treats like an Inner Ring in his discussion with Feverstone (*THS* 18-19).

From this point, Miss Hardcastle takes over his training; she and Feverstone offer to bring Studdock into this fourth ring, called the "Library" set, in return for his compliance on a few newspaper articles. In the rush to be accepted, Mark helps engineer a riot at Edgestow and commits his first real sin without even noticing it. Lewis spends a large amount of time explaining this exact "moment of truth" in "The Inner Ring":

[J]ust at the moment when you are most anxious not to appear crude, or naif or a prig—the hint will come. It will be the hint of something which is not quite in accordance with the technical rules of fair play [...] something which even the outsiders in your own profession are apt to make a fuss about: but something, says your new friend [...] "we always do." And you will be drawn in [...] simply because at that moment, when the cup was so near your lips, you cannot bear to be thrust back again into the cold outer world. (153)

Mark experiences this exact moment in the library and chooses to enter the ring at the peril of his morality; Lewis tells us at this moment, "There may have been a time in the world's history when such moments fully revealed their gravity, with witches prophesying on a blasted heath or visible Rubicons to be crossed. But, for him, it all slipped past in [...] that intimate laughter between fellow professionals" (*THS* 130). The danger to one's soul is the greatest peril of the Inner Ring: "Of all the passions the passion for the Inner Ring is the most skilful in making a man who is not yet a very bad man do very bad things" ("Ring" 154). Studdock ventures further and further into the society of the Institute, and leaves more and more of his nascent morality behind until he turns into a scoundrel. Once Studdock has crossed this threshold, Belbury tries to claim possession of this soul; he descends into the last two rings of the Institute through an attempt by his superiors to gain his complete loyalty.

When Mark refuses to ask his wife to join him at Belbury, Wither and Hardcastle decide to induct him into the fifth ring to ensure his loyalty; Filostrato then introduces Mark to the "Head" of the Institute, the severed head of the murderer Alcasan that Filostrato believes he has kept alive by artificial means. The initiation, at first, works beautifully: "All his anxieties about being in the inner ring or getting a job had shrunk into insignificance. It was a question of life or death. They would kill him if he annoyed them" (*THS* 130). When he further delays, however, they frame him for the

murder of William Hingest and blackmail him into obedience (210). Here again, Studdock has a choice to either reject the Ring or accept its protection, but he again misses the opportunity; the moment “had passed by him without his noticing it” (210). With the Institute desperate to gain Mark’s compliance for their own ends, they decide to initiate him into the sixth and final Inner Ring, called the Circle (255).

At this point, Lewis takes Mark Studdock on a final spiritual progression to rid him of the Ring’s entanglements; at the end of *Kim*, no less than four people vie to control the identity of this boy, who can only stand by and ask himself, “What is Kim?” When he joined the game, Kim gave up his identity as “Friend of All the World” only to slip, chameleon-like, into whatever personality his handlers desired of him. And now, when he has seen the game for all of its sheer brutality and just wants to be rid of the papers he stole from the Russians, he still cannot bear to pull himself away when Mahbub and Hurree come calling. As Mark undergoes this same process, sitting in a jail cell while Wither and Frost determine his future, he reaches a far different conclusion: “his youth approached the moment at which he would begin to be a person” (217).

The thought of death at the hands of his own employers makes Mark question what sort of game he was trying to play: “here was a world of plot within plot, crossing and double-crossing, of lies and graft and stabbing in the back, of murder and a contemptuous guffaw for the fool who lost the game” (245). Upon questioning the outcome of his desires, he naturally begins to question his motives, and has his first moment of true introspection. Mark has spent so much time trying to mirror himself on other people’s approval that he has never needed to look within. When all those mirrors are obscured, and he is finally truly alone in the cell, he can finally ask himself, “What is Mark?” and unlike Kim, find a clear answer. He doesn’t like what he sees:

He had a picture of himself, the odious little outsider who wanted to be an insider, the infantile gull, drinking in the husky and unimportant confidences, as if he were being admitted to the government of the planet.  
(245)

He finally can see himself as others see him.

Mark then has to take responsibility for his own development. First, he reviews all the things he has ever done in pursuit of an Inner Ring

and sees how pointless all those actions were. Then he asks himself the critical question: "When had he ever done what he wanted?" (246). Upon asking the question, he realizes that he has received everything he ever asked for. As the novel explains,

In his normal condition, explanations that laid on impersonal forces outside himself the responsibility for all this life [...] would have occurred to mind and at once been accepted. [...] He was aware [...] that it was he himself—nothing else in the whole universe—that had chosen the dust and broken bottles, the heap of old tin cans, the dry and choking places. (THS 246)

This realization brings Studdock full circle: in a matter of a couple of hours, he goes from a complete solipsist and despicable creature to a man who, upon realizing he has ruined his own life, has his first completely unselfish thought in years when he worries about his wife's welfare. Kim never beat the Ring, but Mark can now identify the danger, resist its influence, and act as an independent being.

### The Great Dance

These are the real consequences of the Great Game: one evades the Law of God only to fall into servitude to devils; in terms of its membership, the desire to be in on the secret set leads to exactly the same place. In both cases, those who choose to remain in the game suffer punishment meted out by God, but devised of their own making. Lewis, however, does not merely criticize Kipling without offering some sort of alternative. In "Kipling's World," he contrasts the Game with a concept from another literary source:

'The game,' he says, 'is more than the player of the game.' But perhaps some games are and some aren't. [...] We want, in fact, a doctrine of Ends. Langland could supply one. He knows how Do Well is connected with Do Bet and Do Best; the ploughing of the half-acre placed in a cosmic context and that context would enable Langland, in principle, to tell us whether any given job in the universe was true worship or miserable idolatry; it is here that Kipling speaks with an uncertain voice. (KW 242)

In this passage, Lewis places two critical ideas in opposition in the Trilogy: for every Maverick who tries to play a Great Game, Lewis sees a "Great Dance" of the entire universe, where even the smallest action in the cosmos affects the destiny of worlds, as long as it is performed in perfect consort and obedience with God's will.<sup>4</sup> Whereas the Game is characterized by resistance and the subversion of the established law, the Dance is, in short, obedience itself; one attains freedom by submitting his or her own will to the design of the universe, moving in harmony and concord within it. When Kim walks up the hill to Lurgan Sahib's house, Mahbub Ali declares, "Here begins the Great Game" (125). When all of Perelandra meets on a hillside to coronate the King, Tor tells Ransom, "[this is] the beginning of the Great Game, of the Great Dance" (*Perelandra* 214).

Lewis himself was fascinated with the concept of the universe as a dance; it appears in several other works, including the *Chronicles of Narnia*, his critical works and several apologetics (Kawano 22). In 1944, the same year in which he gave his oration on "The Inner Ring," Lewis used the Great Dance as an illustration in his broadcast talks for the BBC; these talks were published as *Beyond Personality* in the following year, and later became the final book of his master apologetic *Mere Christianity*. Lewis tried to describe the relationship between Father and Son in these terms: "And that, by the way, is perhaps the most important difference between Christianity and all other religions—that in Christianity God is [...] a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you won't think me irreverent, a kind of dance" (*Personality* 21-2).<sup>5</sup>

Lewis described this dance at length as a part of the Medieval Model in *The Discarded Image*. The angels or Oyarses of the planets in the Space Trilogy also draw their personalities from this model. Lewis illustrated the dance of the cosmos in *The Discarded Image* with an old image of the *Primum mobile*, the farthest sphere of the universe: "You need not wonder that one old picture represents [...] a girl dancing and playing with her sphere as with a ball" (119).<sup>6</sup> Lewis also sees the dance in *Paradise Lost*:

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<sup>4</sup> For a more complete discussion of the Great Dance in Lewis's literature, see also Kawano, Markos, and Sammons.

<sup>5</sup> Kawano cites several of these same passages in his article, but he instead draws them from *Mere Christianity*.

<sup>6</sup> Sammons cites a fairly similar image in her discussion of the dance (124); in the image she recalls, the Intelligence of the *Primum Mobile* plays a tambourine.

"[Milton] pictures the life of beatitude as one of order—an intricate dance, so intricate that it seems irregular precisely when its regularity is most elaborate" (*Preface* 78). For Lewis, this dance is not just for the angels and their ethereal kin; just as plowing a half-acre is a part of the Dance in *Piers Ploughman*, Lewis claims, "The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us: or (putting it the other way round) each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made" (*Personality* 23). Kim sacrifices almost everyone around him to enter the Game, but ultimately feels dissatisfied, alienated and used up; Mark Studdock very nearly suffers the same fate. Yet, through the characters of Ransom and Jane, Lewis reveals that the true path to happiness is through obedience and freedom within the pattern of God's plan. "There is no way out of the centre," the hymnodists of *Perelandra* tell us, "save into the Bent Will which casts itself into the Nowhere. Blessed be He!" (*Perelandra* 216).

Kawano demonstrates that the idea of the cosmos as a great dance comes from ancient roots; the Christian mystics employed it frequently and it was the unifying core of the medieval model (20). Unlike the Copernican universe which ticks by through the indifferent pressure of a spring, the medieval model of the universe acts more like individual movements of a ballet; instead of one giant cog blindly turning the entire behemoth with a disinterested and brute force, each sphere has its own intelligence, who moves its area of influence in conscious step with the others. Kawano also points out, "It is important for us to note that not only are the spheres involved in the dance but so are all earthly phenomena" (21). In each of these spheres, an infinite number of other dances are taking place; each one is completely independent of the others, but still aware of the overall pattern they create. No matter where one might look in the pattern, he or she would see God at the center, exalted by, and a part of, this joyous yet solemn business of play. The hymn in *Perelandra* proclaims this truth: "Where Maleldil is, there is the center. He is in every place. Not some of Him in one place and some in another, but in each place the whole Maleldil, even in the smallness beyond thought" (*Perelandra* 216). Likewise, each part of the dance has an influence on the other: even the smallest earthly phenomena can affect the overall pattern of the universe, and vice versa—also known as the doctrine of Cosmic Correspondence. In the Dance, the microcosm affects the macrocosm, which in turn affects a different microcosm.



One of the largest differences between the Dance and the Game is how each treats the concept of membership; in the Inner Ring, "Exclusion is no accident" ("Ring" 156), but the Great Dance exists exclusively for inclusion. Nothing inside of God's Creation can escape being part of the Dance without consciously removing itself. Lewis explains this concept at length in his essay "Membership," stating, "The Christian is called, not to individualism but to membership in the mystical body" ("Membership" 163).

The dance also operates with a couple of seeming paradoxes: those who are involved in the dance must obey what they are called to do, and yet gain a kind of freedom in doing so. The universe consists of strict hierarchies, but no part of the dance is less important than another; the angels may spin the spheres of the Heavens, but they are no more servants of God than Piers and his half-acre. Lewis claims that the restrictions on freedom are what make true freedom different from slavery and anarchy. "Discipline," he says, "while the world is yet unfallen, exists for the sake of what seems its very opposite—for freedom, almost for extravagance. The pattern deep hidden in the dance [...] alone gives beauty to the wild, free gestures that fill it [...]" (*Preface* 79-80).

In regards to the hierarchy of the Dance, as the angel spins his crystal sphere and Piers tills his field, the infinite levels in this pageant provide a dance of degrees: "[Milton] delights in the ceremonious interchange of unequal courtesies, with condescension (a beautiful word which we have spoiled) on one side and reverence on the other" (*Preface* 78). When all combine, they set the pitch and order of the dance that takes place around, throughout, and with God: "The heavenly frolic arises from an orchestra which is in tune; the rules of courtesy make perfect ease and freedom possible between those who obey them. Without sin, the universe is a Solemn Game: and there is no good game without rules" (80).

Lewis re-creates a version of the Great Dance in the end of *Perelandra*. At the end of Ransom's time on Venus, the Lord and Lady of Venus are appointed as overseers of Perelandra in much the same way that Adam and Eve were intended to be. After this event, Ransom sees the Dance for the first time with his own eyes:

It seemed to be woven out of the intertwining undulation of many cords or bands of light, leaping over and under one another and mutually

embraced in arabesques and flower-like subtleties. Each figure as he looked at it became the master-figure or focus of the whole spectacle, by means of which his eye disentangled all else and brought it into unity—only to be itself entangled when he looked to what he had taken for mere marginal decorations and found that there also the same hegemony was claimed, and the claim made good, yet the former pattern not thereby dispossessed but finding in its new subordination a significance greater than that which it abdicated. (218)

This dance on Perelandra takes place in the absence of evil. When Lewis moves the story to Earth, we see one great difference between the model of the Dance set up here and the Dance as it exists on Earth: whereas the celestial pageant of Milton is pre-lapsarian, Lewis creates a dance on Earth wherein evil chooses not to participate. The disobedience of many of its members tries to set the music of the dance out of tune. Yet, as one of Perelandra's five hymnodists tells us, "The Great Dance does not wait to be perfect until the peoples of the Low Worlds are gathered into it. We speak not of when it will begin. It has begun from before always" (214). Therefore, creatures who have never participated in the Dance must somehow enter in from the outside; through the characters of Ransom and Jane, he reveals how people out of step with the rest of the cosmos can learn, literally, to dance among angels.

According to Christian doctrine, no person can seek after righteousness on his or her own; their naturally sinful state blinds them to things of a spiritual nature. Therefore, just as I John 4:19 states that we love because God loved us first, man can seek after God only if God initiates the relationship. Lewis probably had this point of theology in mind when he created Ransom's character; the only way he ever discovers his spiritual need is after being drugged, assaulted, and kidnapped, and after becoming the object of an armed manhunt. When Oyarsa asks Weston and Devine to bring him a man to learn the Martian language, they obligingly kidnap one to throw him, so they think, to his doom. Ransom cannot see Mars, the *hmanau*, or the *eldila* as they really exist because he is spiritually blind; he assumes that the Martians are irrational and dangerous, so he runs from them at every turn. In running from the Martians, however, he also avoids joining the Dance. Oyarsa describes Ransom's flight from his point of view:

“You began to be afraid of me before you set foot in my world. [...] My servants saw your fear when you were in your ship in heaven. [...] I stirred up a *hnakra* to try if you would come to me of your own will. But you hid among the *hrossa*, 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 chased you to me [...]” (*OSP* 119)

Only when Ransom can no longer hide, and can understand his situation, can he choose to enter the Dance. He makes his first attempt to work in the will of God when he places himself between Weston and Oyarsa as their translator. After he joins the pattern of the universe, he chooses to return to Earth rather than stay on Mars. Showing Ransom’s new position in the scheme of the cosmos, Oyarsa tells him for the first time, “You have chosen rightly” (142).

On *Perelandra*, Ransom tries to move in the Great Dance for the first time on his own, but he constantly finds himself frustrated because he cannot find the pattern from his limited point of view. As Ransom tries to protect the Lady from Weston’s machinations, he feels incapable of winning the battle: “The unfairness of it all was wounding him like barbed wire” (*Perelandra* 121). Even the thought of what rested on his shoulders tortures him:

A stone may determine the course of a river. He was that stone [...] which had become the centre of the whole universe. The *eldila* of all worlds, the sinless organisms of everlasting light, were silent in Deep Heaven to see what Elwin Ransom [...] would do. (142)

As long as Ransom agonizes over his decision, he cannot understand that the outcome is already determined; he merely has to choose to accept it. Once he understands this and lets himself follow God’s will, Ransom walks into his fierce battle with the Un-Man with complete peace: “The thing was going to be done. There was going to arrive, in the course of time, a moment at which he would have done it. The future act stood there, fixed and unaltered as if he had already performed it” (149). In the end, after he finishes his duty and kills the Un-Man, he participates in the Dance, in the scene described earlier, for a full *Perelandran* year.

On Earth, however, finding one’s place in the Dance can be far more difficult. All the members of the Grail Company are integral components of

the Dance, but none of them can see how they fit into the pattern. In the confusion, none of the residents of St. Anne's can even tell if they are actually part of the Company. Dimble claims that he is merely a "camp follower" because his arrival at St. Anne's was more or less an accident; yet as the story plays out, one can see that his knowledge of Latin and Arthurian legend is essential to the quest for Merlin. MacPhee more pointedly calls their organization "blind man's buff" (*THS* 198). After the Company has completed its task and the threat of Belbury is destroyed, MacPhee especially cannot see the pattern of the Dance; he tells Ransom, "I'd be greatly obliged if any one would tell me what we *have* done—always apart from feeding the pigs and raising some very decent vegetables." Ransom's response emphasizes the obedience of the Dance: "You have done what was required of you" (*THS* 370).

Jane's situation when she enters the Company centers on her failed marriage. According to 1 Corinthians 11, marriage is a type for the relationship between God and Christ; the wife therefore submits to her husband in a marriage the same way Christ submits to the Father.<sup>7</sup> Since, as most Christians believe, Christ and the Father are equal parts of the Trinity, how could this sort of submission demean or dishonor either party? Yet, neither Mark nor Jane approaches their marriage with this sort of honor; Mark treats his marriage like extension of his ego and Jane pulls away from her husband out of fear of losing her freedom. When Jane starts to have strange dreams, her reaction to both the Company and God's call into the Dance is the same as her reaction to her husband: "Take care. [...] Don't commit yourself to anything. You've got your own life to live" (115). She also fears commitment: "All she wanted was to be left alone" (83).

Ultimately, Jane realizes she can't remain aloof; like it or no, the world—be it the man in the pince-nez, or her dreams, or even the Dennistons—keeps pushing into her life. Upon meeting the Director, she realizes for the first time that obedience does not mean subjugation; rather, it is the source of the first real joy she ever experiences. The Director summarizes Lewis's ideas of the Dance and the source of joy in Ransom's reply to her:<sup>8</sup> "you do not fail in obedience through lack of love, but have lost love because you never attempted obedience" (147). He also tries to

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis himself goes at some length into this analogy in his essay, "Christianity and Literature." See bibliography for cit., p. 187-190.

<sup>8</sup> Jane's objections on the basis of Equality are discussed in "Membership," p. 167-171.

redefine for her what obedience actually looks like: “you see that obedience and rule are more like a dance than a drill—specially between man and woman where the roles are always changing” (149). The knowledge provides Jane with, for the first time, a sort of well-being: “Jane was simply in a state of joy. [...] [S]he was in the sphere of Jove, amid the light and music and festal pomp [...]. [W]hatever she tried to think of led back to the Director himself and, in him, to joy” (151-2). Upon seeing the true nature of submission, and feeling firsthand the “rapture of obedience” that comes with it, she wants more than anything to join in the “festal pomp.” According to Lewis’s essay, “The Weight of Glory,” joy is the natural result of obedience to God’s will:

[N]othing can eliminate from the parable the divine *accolade*, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” [...] I suddenly remembered that no one can enter heaven except as a child; and nothing is so obvious in a child [...] as its great and undisguised pleasure in being praised. [...] Apparently what I had mistaken for humility had, all these years, prevented me from understanding what is in fact the humblest, the most childlike, the most creaturely of pleasures—nay, the specific pleasure of the inferior: the pleasure of a beast before men, a child before its father, a pupil before its teacher, a creature before its Creator. (36-37)

At this point, Jane is so close to stepping into the Dance that she stumbles into one real danger: she is fearfully close to treating the Grail Company like an Inner Ring. While she talks to Ransom, she has a desperate need to join him—not because she wants to serve Maleldil, but because she wants to be near the Director. Her fear of rejection is startlingly similar to her husband’s at the N.I.C.E.: “Now that the threat of expulsion from the house was imminent, she felt a kind of desperation” (146). She even offers, in imitation of her husband, to sacrifice her relationship with her spouse in return for membership. Refusing Jane entrance at this point, even though she ends up brutalized by Fairy Hardcastle, ensures that she enters the Dance and not the Ring.

From this point, Jane enters the Dance by degrees; when she heads out with the search party to find Merlin, she tells Ransom, “Sir [...] I know nothing of Maleldil. But I place myself in obedience to you” (229). At this point, however, Jane still has not overcome her previous prejudice against the male: the “complacent, patriarchal figures making arrangements for

women as if women were children or bartering them like cattle" (117). This particular problem keeps her from becoming a part of God's Dance because those who act without conforming themselves to the rules only participate in wild anarchy. Jane has a startling vision of a wild woman in a red calasiris<sup>9</sup> which illustrates her own need to keep control:

With a great glow and a noise like fire the flame-robed woman and the malapert dwarves had all come into the house. [...] The strange woman had a torch in her hand. It burned with a terrible, blinding brightness, crackling, and sent up clouds of dense, black smoke [...] she had hardly time to think of that for her whole attention was fixed by the outrageous behaviour of the little men. They began making hay of the room. In a few seconds the bed was a mere chaos [...]. "Look out! Look out, can't you?" shouted Jane, for the giantess was beginning to touch various parts of the room with her torch. She touched a vase on the mantelpiece. Instantly there rose from it a streak of color Jane which took for fire. [...] But just as the terror of this became unbearable, Jane noticed that what was curling up from everything was not flame at all, but vegetation. [...] The smells, the heat, the crowding, and the strangeness made her feel faint. (305)

This giant, dominating woman and her contemptible little dwarves reveal the two major flaws in Jane's concept of submission: first, the woman spins out of control without any complement to her overbearing presence; such is someone who tries to join in the Dance without a dance partner. Male and female are meant to dance in consort, and as such define, complement, and glorify one another. Jane still balks at the idea of fixing her failed marriage; the result is the extreme tyranny of one gender over the other seen here. The second problem is that Jane still does not want to completely submit herself to another authority—be it Christianity, her husband, or even the Grail Company—and therefore dances without restriction. The scarlet woman's wild, destructive and chaotic actions are therefore a representation of Jane's own femininity run amok.

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<sup>9</sup> The calasiris is generally an Egyptian or Mesopotamian dress, which Lewis describes at length in Jane's vision: "A flame coloured robe, in which her hands were hidden, covered this person from her feet to where it rose behind her neck in a kind of high ruff-like collar, but in the front it was so low or open that it exposed her large breasts. [...] Some such dress Jane had seen worn by a Minoan priestess on a vase from old Cnosus" (*THS* 304). The calasiris is intended to emphasize the extreme and almost ferocious femininity of the giantess.

Ransom clearly states her problem when he interprets her vision: "You had better agree with your adversary [God] quickly" (316). Jane now realizes that the joy of obedience she felt has not really been for Ransom, but for an even higher law of humility and obedience: she reconciles herself to Christ, and in the final scene of the Trilogy, enters the cottage to both renew her marriage to her husband and enter into the Dance with him (382). Jane and Mark now enter into God's Dance, avoiding the personal destruction caused by the Game; both lose their egotism to something much larger, and ultimately, more satisfying than what Kipling could offer to Kim. While neither of these characters dances with the angels of the Spheres in the same way Ransom does, they begin their smaller, but equally important dance with one another in step to the will of God—and therefore take just as much of a part in the "Solemn Game" of the universe.

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