

WL 301W - WRITING AND RESEARCH: “THE BIBLE AND MID-20TH CENTURY NOVELS AND FILM”

Guest Lecturer: Fr. Justin Hewlett

1. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954)

Introduction: The "Gandalf's Battle with the Balrog" YouTube compilation/excerpt (link at end of text) is almost perfect, except that it (not unnaturally) omits the bit where Gandalf's spirit leaves the world and then is sent back (since its focus is on his battle with the Balrog). Here is the full text excerpt of the story, which is, of course, told in two parts.

Gandalf's Battle with the Balrog

...it was not the trolls that had filled the Elf with terror. The ranks of the orcs had opened, and they crowded away, as if they themselves were afraid. Something was coming up behind them. What it was could not be seen: it was like a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe, yet greater; and a power and terror seemed to be in it and to go before it.

It came to the edge of the fire and the light faded as if a cloud had bent over it. Then with a rush it leaped across the fissure. The flames roared up to greet it, and wreathed about it; and a black smoke swirled in the air. Its streaming mane kindled, and blazed behind it. In its right hand was a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire; in its left it held a whip of many thongs.

'Ai! ai!' wailed Legolas. 'A Balrog! A Balrog is come!'

Gimli stared with wide eyes. 'Durin's Bane!' he cried, and letting his axe fall he covered his face.

'A Balrog,' muttered Gandalf. 'Now I understand.' He faltered and leaned heavily on his staff. 'What an evil fortune! And I am already weary.'

The dark figure streaming with fire raced towards them. The orcs yelled and poured over the stone gangways. Then Boromir raised his horn and blew. Loud the challenge rang and bellowed, like the shout of many throats under the cavernous roof. For a moment the orcs quailed and the fiery shadow halted. Then the echoes died as suddenly as a flame blown out by a dark wind, and the enemy advanced again.

'Over the bridge!' cried Gandalf, recalling his strength. 'Fly! This is a foe beyond any of you. I must hold the narrow way. Fly!' Aragorn and Boromir did not heed the command, but still held their ground, side by side, behind Gandalf at the far end of the bridge. The others halted just within the doorway at the hall's end, and turned, unable to leave their leader to face the enemy alone.

The Balrog reached the bridge. Gandalf stood in the middle of the span, leaning on the staff in his left hand, but in his other hand Glamdring gleamed, cold and white. His enemy halted again, facing him, and the shadow about it reached out like two vast wings. It raised the whip, and the thongs whined and cracked. Fire came from its nostrils. But Gandalf stood firm.

'You cannot pass,' he said. The orcs stood still, and a dead silence fell. 'I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor. You cannot pass. The dark fire will not avail you, flame of Udûn. Go back to the Shadow! You cannot pass.'

The Balrog made no answer. The fire in it seemed to die, but the darkness grew. It stepped forward slowly on to the bridge, and suddenly it drew itself up to a great height, and its wings were spread from wall to wall; but still Gandalf could be seen, glimmering in the gloom; he seemed small, and altogether alone: grey and bent, like a wizened tree before the onset of a storm.

From out of the shadow a red sword leaped flaming.

Glamdring glittered white in answer.

There was a ringing clash and a stab of white fire. The Balrog fell back and its sword flew up in molten fragments. The wizard swayed on the bridge, stepped back a pace, and then again stood still.

'You cannot pass!' he said.

With a bound the Balrog leaped full upon the bridge. Its whip whirled and hissed.

'He cannot stand alone!' cried Aragorn suddenly and ran back along the bridge. 'Elendil!' he shouted. 'I am with you, Gandalf!'

'Gondor!' cried Boromir and leaped after him.

At that moment Gandalf lifted his staff, and crying aloud he smote the bridge before him. The staff broke asunder and fell from his hand.

A blinding sheet of white flame sprang up. The bridge cracked. Right at the Balrog's feet it broke, and the stone upon which it stood crashed into the gulf, while the rest remained, poised, quivering like a tongue of rock thrust out into emptiness.

With a terrible cry the Balrog fell forward, and its shadow plunged down and vanished. But even as it fell it swung its whip, and the thongs lashed and curled about the wizard's knees, dragging him to the brink. He staggered and fell, grasped vainly at the stone, and slid into the abyss. 'Fly, you fools!' he cried, and was gone.

...

'Then tell us what you will, and time allows!' said Gimli. 'Come, Gandalf, tell us how you fared with the Balrog!'

'Name him not!' said Gandalf, and for a moment it seemed that a cloud of pain passed over his face, and he sat silent, looking old as death. 'Long time I fell,' he said at last, slowly, as if thinking back with difficulty. 'Long I fell, and he fell with me. His fire was about me. I was burned. Then we plunged into the deep water and all was dark. Cold it was as the tide of death: almost it froze my heart.'

'Deep is the abyss that is spanned by Durin's Bridge, and none has measured it,' said Gimli.

'Yet it has a bottom, beyond light and knowledge,' said Gandalf. 'Thither I came at last, to the uttermost foundations of stone. He was with me still. His fire was quenched, but now he was a thing of slime, stronger than a strangling snake. We fought far under the living earth, where time is not counted. Ever he clutched me, and ever I hewed him, till at last he fled into dark tunnels. They were not made by Durin's folk, Gimli son of Gloin. Far, far below the deepest delvings of the Dwarves, the world is gnawed by nameless things. Even Sauron knows them not. They are older than he. Now I have walked there, but I will bring no report to darken the light of day. In that despair my enemy was my only hope, and I pursued him, clutching at his heel. Thus he brought me back at last to the secret ways of Khazad-dûm: too well he knew them all. Ever up now we went, until we came to the Endless Stair.'

'Long has that been lost,' said Gimli. 'Many have said that it was never made save in legend, but others say that it was destroyed.'

'It was made, and it had not been destroyed,' said Gandalf. 'From the lowest dungeon to the highest peak it climbed, ascending in unbroken spiral in many thousand steps, until it issued at last in Durin's Tower carved in the living rock of Zirakzigil, the pinnacle of the Silvertine.'

'There upon Celebdil was a lonely window in the snow, and before it lay a narrow space, a dizzy eyrie above the mists of the world. The sun shone fiercely there, but all below was wrapped in cloud. Out he sprang, and even as I came behind, he burst into new flame. There was none to see, or perhaps in after ages songs would still be sung of the Battle of the Peak.' Suddenly Gandalf laughed. 'But what would they say in song? Those that looked up from afar thought that the mountain was crowned with storm. Thunder they heard, and lightning, they said, smote upon Celebdil, and leaped back broken into tongues of fire. Is not that enough? A great smoke

rose about us, vapour and steam. Ice fell like rain. I threw down my enemy, and he fell from the high place and broke the mountain-side where he smote it in his ruin. Then darkness took me, and I strayed out of thought and time, and I wandered far on roads that I will not tell.

'Naked I was sent back - for a brief time, until my task is done. And naked I lay upon the mountain-top. The tower behind was crumbled into dust, the window gone; the ruined stair was choked with burned and broken stone. I was alone, forgotten, without escape upon the hard horn of the world. There I lay staring upward, while the stars wheeled over, and each day was as long as a life-age of the earth. Faint to my ears came the gathered rumour of all lands : the springing and the dying, the song and the weeping, and the slow everlasting groan of overburdened stone. And so at the last Gwaihir the Windlord found me again, and he took me up and bore me away.

"Ever am I fated to be your burden, friend at need," I said.

"A burden you have been," he answered, "but not so now. Light as a swan's feather in my claw you are. The Sun shines through you. Indeed I do not think you need me any more: were I to let you fall, you would float upon the wind."

"Do not let me fall!" I gasped, for I felt life in me again. "Bear me to Lothlórien!"

—Excerpt from *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien (1954), pp. 348-349, 523-524 (the single-volume edition published by Harper Collins in 1991)

Jackson's LoTR: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DgNrvnY1mo0>

2. John Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* (1951)

Introduction: Civilization has collapsed due to a sudden widespread blindness which allows genetically engineered semi-sentient plants (triffids) to emerge as the dominant species on earth.

Sci-Fi Mythography in *The Day of the Triffids*

Josella frowned down on a group of four triffids ambling across a field below us.

"If I were a child now," she said reflectively, "I think I should want a reason for what happened. Unless I was given it—that is, if I were allowed to think that I had been born into a world which had been quite pointlessly destroyed—I should find living quite pointless too. That does make it awfully difficult, because it seems to be just what *has* happened ..."

She paused, pondering, then she added:

"Do you think we could— do you think we should be justified in starting a myth to help them? A story of a world that was wonderfully clever, but so wicked that it had to be destroyed—or destroyed itself by accident? Something like the Flood, again? That wouldn't crush them with inferiority—it could give the incentive to build, and this time to build something better."

"Yes..." I said, considering it. "Yes. It's often a good idea to tell children the truth. Kind of makes things easier for them later on—only why pretend it's a myth?"

Josella demurred at that.

"How do you mean? The triffids were—well, they were somebody's fault, or mistake, I admit. But the rest?"

"I don't think we can blame anyone too much for the triffids. The extracts they give were very valuable in the circumstances. Nobody can ever see what a major discovery is going to lead to—whether it is a new kind of engine or a triffid—and we coped with them all right in normal conditions. We benefited quite a lot from them, as long as the conditions were to their disadvantage."

"Well, it wasn't our fault the conditions changed. It was— just one of those things. Like earthquakes or hurricanes—what an insurance company would call an act of God. Maybe that's just what it was—a judgment. Certainly we never brought that comet."

"Didn't we, Josella? Are you quite sure of that?"

She turned to look at me.

"Are you trying to tell me that you don't think it was a comet at all?"

"Just exactly that," I agreed.

"But— I don't understand. It must— What else could it have been?"

I opened a vacuum-packed can of cigarettes and lit one for each of us.

"You remember what Michael Beadley said about the tightrope we'd all been walking on for years?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, I think that what happened was that we came off it—and that a few of us just managed to survive the crash."

I drew on my cigarette, looking out at the sea and at the infinite blue sky above it.

"Up there," I went on, "up there there were—and maybe there still are—unknown numbers of satellite weapons circling round and round the Earth. Just a lot of dormant menaces, touring around, waiting for someone, or something, to set them off. What was in them? You don't know; I don't know. Top-secret stuff. All we've heard is guesses—fissile materials, radioactive dusts, bacteria, viruses... Now suppose that one type happened to have been constructed especially to emit radiations that our eyes would not stand—something that would burn out or at least damage the optic nerve."

Josella gripped my hand.

"Oh no, Bill No, they couldn't ... That'd be—diabolical. ... Oh, I can't believe— Oh no, Bill!"

"My sweet, all the things up there were diabolical. ... Do you doubt that if it could be done, someone would do it? ... Then suppose there were a mistake, or perhaps an accident—maybe such an accident as actually encountering a shower of comet debris, if you like—which starts some of these things popping. ...

"Somebody begins talking about comets. It might not be politic to deny that—and there turned out to be so little time, anyway.

"Well, naturally these things would have been intended to operate close to the ground, where the effect would be spread over a definitely calculable area. But they start going off out there in space, or maybe when they hit the atmosphere—either way, they're operating so far up that people all round the world can receive direct radiations from them. ...

"Just what did happen is anyone's guess now. But one thing I'm quite certain of—that somehow or other we brought this lot down on ourselves. ... And there was that plague, too: it wasn't typhoid, you know. . .

"I find that it's just the wrong side of coincidence for me to believe that out of all the thousands of years in which a destructive comet could arrive, it happens to do so just a few years after we have succeeded in establishing satellite weapons—don't you? No, I think that we kept on that tightrope quite a while, considering the things that might have happened—but sooner or later the foot had to slip."

"Well, when you put it that way—" murmured Josella. She broke off and was lost in silence for quite a while. Then she said:

"I suppose, in a way, that should be more horrible than the idea of nature striking blindly at us. And yet I don't think it is. It makes me feel less hopeless about things because it makes them at least comprehensible. If it was like that, then it is at least a thing that can be prevented from happening again—just one more of the mistakes our very great grandchildren are going to have to avoid. And, oh dear, there were so many, many mistakes! But we can warn them."

"H'm—well," I said. "Anyway, once they've beaten the triffids, and pulled themselves out of this mess, they'll have plenty of scope for making brand-new mistakes of their very own."

"Poor little things," she said, as if she were gazing down increasingly great rows of grandchildren, "it's not much that we're offering them, is it?"

—Excerpt from *The Day of the Triffids*, pp. 171-174, published by Fawcett Crest, Copyright 1951 Doubleday & Company, Inc.

3. C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938)

*Introduction: The climactic chapter of C.S. Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet* (Chapter 20) serves as an excellent example of a sort of "reversed" Christian intertextuality - that is to say, instead of referring back to the Christian Scriptures, this exchange between the great Earth scientist, Dr. Weston, and the guardian spirit (Oyarsa) of Mars brings the Christian "mythical" perspective to bear on what was the main motive for space exploration in H.G. Wells and many other early science fiction authors and is still the primary motivating force behind much space-exploration today, as can be seen in some of what Elon Musk has said on the topic:*

"We should expand the scope and scale of consciousness, whether silicon or carbon, to understand the universe."

—source: <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1836099988427796580>

A little more of the context for Chapter 20 would be that the "hross" (plural: "hrossa") is one of the native Martian creatures, and that the other speaker, Devine, is Dr. Weston's "partner-in-crime" who, together with Weston, kidnapped the person who is the translator in this passage, Ransom (who is also the main character of the story and is actually a philologist and is loosely based on Tolkien). Other important terminology would be that "Malacandra" is the native name for Mars and "Thulcandra" is their name for Earth, "hnau" is the Martian word for a sentient being, the "Bent One" is the evil spirit who has taken over Earth, and "Maleldil" is God:

Intertextual Dialogue: Wells and Lewis as Weston and the Oyarsa of Malacandra

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, Hnoo,’ 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 own 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. To-day, 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 . . . 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 only 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 *pfifltriggi*. 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 to-day 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 it, 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. To-morrow 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 *pfifltriggi* 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 20 of *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), from Project Gutenberg

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