

Author Interview Questions on *Through the Wardrobe*

HERBIE BRENNAN

Q: How old were you when you first read the Chronicles of Narnia?

A: Getting on a bit, actually—late teens or early twenties, as I recall. The thing was I read Lewis's science fiction first: *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, *That Hideous Strength*. Absolutely adored them and went hunting for more. When there weren't any more, I turned to Narnia in desperation. With a title like *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, I thought I might be buying something for tiny tots, but instead I found a new Lewis love.

Q: What is it about Lewis's writing that captures you as a reader?

A: I'm hugely attracted to his cosmic vision and the spirituality of his themes. The literary critics I've read all seem to see this in terms of religion—specifically Lewis's Christianity—but I don't think religion has very much to do with it. There are certain great mythic stories that reach out to us down the centuries and Lewis taps into this stream.

Q: Is there a character in Narnia that you particularly take to?

A: Oooh yes—I really fancy Jadis, the White Witch. I've always liked bossy women (you don't have to think when you're with them) and villains are far more interesting than heroes. Besides, she's tall, which is very attractive in a girl, and I heard somewhere that she was descended from Lilith, Adam's first wife. Rabbinical lore has it that Lilith was a hairy demoness. With an ancestry like that, how could I not be fascinated?

Q: There are countless stories of good vs. evil in our culture. What makes the Chronicles of Narnia special?

A: We're back to your second question here. The story of Good versus Evil is one of those great archetypal themes I was talking about that reach directly into the human soul. It's not that Narnia is especially special—it really makes no sense to compare, say, Lewis with Tolkien, who dealt with the same theme. If you can write anyway well (and Lewis certainly could) then the choice of theme automatically makes your work special.

Q: What kind of impact did Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia have on your writing?

A: Do you know, I haven't the slightest idea. Critics are always finding stuff in my writing I never knew was there. My problem is I write in a sort of trance, never plan anything, find characters rather than create them, and can't say how the book will end until it's finished. When I finally climb out of the mess, I usually drink some gin so I'm seldom in a fit state to analyze my

influences. *[Editor's Note: Kids, don't try this at home. Herbie is a) a trained professional, and b) over 21 years of age.]*

Q: Are there any similarities between Narnia and the world of *Faerie Wars*?

A: Yes. They're both concerned with real people caught up in cosmic themes.

Q: If you could send one of your *Faerie Wars* characters through the wardrobe, who would it be? What do you think they'd do there?

A: I think I'd send Henry through. Pyrgus would get diverted rescuing fauns, Blue would simply take over from the White Witch, but Henry has a real nose for bumbling through and setting things right, which is what Narnia needs when you go through the wardrobe for the first time.

BRENT HARTINGER

Q: Your piece in *Through the Wardrobe* ("Forgotten Castles and Magical Creatures in Hiding") is mostly about *Prince Caspian*. Is *Prince Caspian* your favorite book in the *Chronicles of Narnia*?

A: It's so hard to choose! But I have to choose just one, huh? No, my favorites are *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Well, and *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Wow, that's three. I told you can't pick one! But *Prince Caspian* would be my fourth favorite after those three.

No matter what, I think we all agree that *The Last Battle* is everyone's least favorite, right? The book just doesn't work like the others.

Q: You could say your *Through the Wardrobe* piece is, in part, about how we see things. Did you see anything new in the *Chronicles of Narnia* when you re-read them to participate in this anthology, that you hadn't seen when you were younger?

A: It's a cliché, but yes, every time I read them, I see something new. This time around, I was struck by Lewis' droll wit and his absolute mastery of storytelling. There are so many indelible moments in those books! And the pace just doesn't stop. Even when he's violated a "rule," it doesn't matter, because you just want to keep reading. That's true genius.

Q: Which king or queen of Narnia would you say you're most like?

A: What an interesting question. I would say I'm like Lucy or Peter-- sensitive and kind or noble and brave. But the truth is I'm probably more like Edmond-- flawed, but ultimately decent.

SARAH BETH DURST

Q: Your essay in *Through the Wardrobe* is about (as you titled the piece) "Missing the Point"-- how not understanding the religious symbolism doesn't mean you can't appreciate the books. When and how did you find out about the whole religious symbolism thing?

A: Last week. Okay, maybe it was a bit longer ago than that, but I know I didn't figure it out on my own. Someone told me. And then I denied it for a while. I'm pretty good at the whole denial thing. Once (and this really was a long time ago-- honest!), I wrote a letter to the Tooth Fairy asking what she looked like. I left it with my tooth. In the morning, I discovered a quarter plus a letter signed by the Tooth Fairy that said she looked a little like me but she had brown curly hair and wings. Now, my mom looks a little like me and has brown curly hair . . . but she doesn't have wings. It didn't occur to me for literally years that perhaps my mom wrote the letter.

Q: Which king or queen of Narnia do you think you're most like?

A: Lucy. If faced with a magical wardrobe, I would absolutely be the first one through it, and I'd love to have tea with Faun Tumnus. I wish I could say that I'd be more kick-butt than Lucy (Susan gets the sweet bow and arrow, and Lucy gets what? The magical version of a hotel room shampoo bottle?). But if I'm going to be honest, I wouldn't be much use in a magical battle. If you gave me a sword, I'd probably just get it stuck in the ground. I'm about as coordinated as a beached manatee.

SOPHIE MASSON

Q: Your essay is *Through the Wardrobe* is, in part, about traveling between worlds-- some of them hidden. What do you think Narnia and the Hidden World from your Thomas Trew series have in common?

A: They are both places you reach through our (human) world, and both are places where only exciting-- and no dull and boring and humdrum!-- things happen. Sometimes those things can be scary but they are never boring.

Q: If you could put any character from Narnia into one of your stories, who would it be?

A: Puddleglum the Marsh-wiggle from *The Silver Chair*. I love him!

SUSAN VAUGHT

Q. The essay you did for *Through the Wardrobe* actually talks about a similar topic [to your essay in *Secrets of the Dragon Riders*, on how older does not always equal wiser]-- how just because characters (like Reepicheep the mouse or the Pevensie children) are smaller, that doesn't mean they can be discounted. Do you think the *Inheritance Cycle* and the *Chronicles of Narnia* have anything else in common?

A: I think both sets of stories deal with lands who have once known spectacular magic, but through short-sightedness and greed (or poor luck), have lost that magic. They have a chance to rebuild, to rise again and regain that which has been lost to them, but those with good hearts must triumph over evil, and learn the depths of their own true strength. Both sets of stories also deal with very different types of creatures and races learning to work together in harmony to achieve a common goal.

Q. Your Narnia essay was pretty focused on the events in *Prince Caspian*. What did you think of the 2008 movie version?

A: I was pleased with the movie version. It was, like the story itself, action-oriented and tense, with very high stakes. I really liked the casting of Prince Caspian himself, and Miraz. I would have liked to have seen more of Miraz's betrayal by his own people-but overall, I definitely give the movie an "A."