

Book Review Supplement

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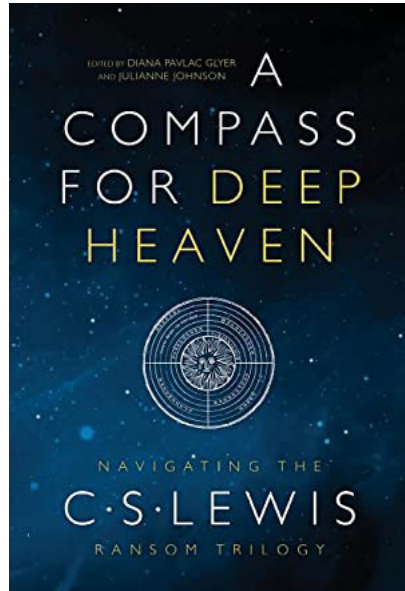
A Compass for Deep Heaven: Navigating the C.S. Lewis Ransom Trilogy.
Ed. by Diana Pavlac Glyer and Julianne Johnson (Baltimore: Square Halo Books, 2021).

Too few people make it to the Ransom Trilogy, even among readers who profess to have read and enjoyed C.S. Lewis. Many casual readers limit their exploration of Lewis's work to the usual suspects: *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Screwtape Letters*, and maybe one or two of the shorter essay collections. Even those who can rattle off quotes about mudpies in slums or Aslan being good but not safe are sometimes unaware of the Ransom Trilogy.

For those who are not thoroughgoing science fiction fans, the Ransom Trilogy can be harder work than some of the most popular Lewis texts. Distance from some of the cultural references and literary allusions in the Ransom Trilogy leaves contemporary readers in need of a guide to better understand the richness of the series. Lewis originally published *Out of the Silent Planet* in 1938, *Perelandra* in 1943, and *That Hideous Strength* in 1945. *A Compass for Deep Heaven* offers an accessible overview of some of the more challenging elements of the Ransom Trilogy.

This volume, comprised of ten essays and an introduction, is a useful tool for getting more out of reading the Ransom Trilogy. The book was originally published by the Honors College of Azusa Pacific University in 2019. It has been reprinted by a small, relatively new publisher, Square Halo Books. Readers familiar with Lewis studies will find few names (yet) of note in the list of contributors, because the authors were all undergraduates when these essays were written in 2019. The editors, Glyer and Johnson, have done their work well: the most significant clue to the age and scholarly experience of the authors is the absence among the contributor biographies of a range of Ph.D.-granting institutions.

The introduction does what any good introduction should do: it explains the subject matter and points readers toward the meat of the book. The first



essay, by Julianne Johnson, is an excellent overview of the concept of myth, especially in the manner that Lewis and Tolkien used it throughout their writing. This essay serves as an anchor for the volume. In chapter 2, Jacob Meyer explores Lewis's description of his own approach to science fiction and situates the space trilogy within the literature of that day. Rachel Roller then takes up the torch to demonstrate that Lewis did not despise science but was an opponent of Scientism. She navigates the criticism levied against Lewis and draws in parallels between *The Abolition of Man* and *That Hideous Strength*. In chapter 4, J.D. Wunderly highlights how Lewis's experiences during the world wars may have influenced his ideas of power and violence. The fifth chapter, by Maya Maley, situates the Ransom Trilogy within the Medieval cosmos as Lewis understood it.

Chapter 6 explores the theological theme of pride within the Ransom Trilogy. This essay by Nolan Andrew highlights the classically Christian worldview of C.S. Lewis, which helps to explain so much of what he wrote. The seventh and eighth chapters are both by Daniel Hsieh. They may be taken as a unit as they both explore the connections between *That Hideous Strength* and the Arthurian legends. Chapter 9, by Daniel Friend, highlights the concept of the existence of a natural law that flows beneath the surface of the Ransom Trilogy. Finally, in the tenth chapter, Evangeline Prior evaluates the Ransom Trilogy as literature, showing that Lewis, the Cambridge don, did more than write an entertaining bit of fiction; these are stories that are worthy of critical consideration.

A Compass for Deep Heaven is an unpretentious introduction to the Ransom Trilogy. This is a book about Lewis's work that maintains its focus on the work under consideration. The focus on the texts themselves is refreshing; too many academic works become convoluted research projects that focus on what someone else said about the work rather than the work itself. The range in essay topics is sufficiently broad to answer more common questions raised by the Ransom Trilogy, but there is cohesion of topic and tone among the contributions.

A Compass for Deep Heaven is a pleasure to read and a worthy contribution to ongoing Lewis studies. I expect to see the names of many of these authors again as contributors to scholarly volumes, as well as on the cover of books about Lewis and other topics.

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