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by Gary L. Tandy

From the moment his likeness was featured on the September 1947 cover of *Time* magazine, any hope that C. S. Lewis may have had of remaining an obscure medieval/renaissance scholar was lost. His apologetic works (*Mere Christianity*, *Miracles*, *The Problem of Pain*) made him a celebrity among American Christians, and his fictional works (*The Great Divorce*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*) extended his reach and broadened his audience among both Christian and non-Christian readers. In more recent times, the movie version of the play *Shadowlands* and the Disney/Walden Media feature films of *The Chronicles of Narnia* have once again thrust Lewis into the spotlight of popular and media culture in the United States. I suppose it is not surprising, then, that we continue to find references to and mention of C. S. Lewis and his works in popular culture. Recently, while watching the final season of the popular ABC television series, *LOST*, I encountered yet another example of Lewis and his works exerting their influence in American popular culture.

For those unfamiliar with this television phenomenon, the series began in the Fall of 2004 and ran for six seasons, ending in the Spring of 2010. Here is a brief plot summary from the ABC web site:

Oceanic Air flight 815 tore apart in mid-air and crashed, leaving 48 passengers alive and stranded on a remote island in the South Pacific. The survivors include a diverse group of people from different walks of life: a doctor, an escaped fugitive, a con man, an Iraqi interrogator, a married Korean couple and a man formerly confined to a wheelchair who is now inexplicably healed. As the castaways attempt to get home, flashbacks (and forwards) illuminate their troubled lives before

and after the crash, as the island they find themselves stranded on begins to slowly reveal its mysterious nature. Faith, reason, destiny and free will all clash as the island offers opportunities for both corruption and redemption... but as to its true purpose? That's the greatest mystery of all. (*LOST: The Final Season*, ABC)

As I watched the sixth season of this series, and particularly, the final episode, I began to notice several elements in the show that recalled some of Lewis' works. In particular, I wondered whether the *LOST* producers and writers had read and were perhaps borrowing elements from C. S. Lewis' space travel fantasy *Perelandra* (1944). The second book in Lewis's science fiction trilogy, the novel tells the story of Elwin Ransom, a Cambridge philologist, who travels to Venus (called *Perelandra* in the novel) and discovers an innocent paradise with only two humanlike inhabitants. Ransom's arrival is followed closely by that of Weston, a mad scientist type, who wants to conquer *Perelandra* and use it for his nefarious plans. However, it soon becomes obvious to Ransom that Weston's body has been taken over by a dark power (The Devil), who sets out to tempt the female inhabitant of *Perelandra* and cause her to disobey the commands of Maleldil (God). In one of Lewis' supposals, the action on *Perelandra* seems to address this question: if God created life on another planet, would the fall of this new species (as recounted in Genesis) be inevitable or might events turn out differently? Elwin Ransom, the reluctant hero of the novel, slowly comes to the realization that he has been brought to *Perelandra* for one reason: to prevent the dark power, in the form of Weston, from corrupting the innocence of the Green Lady, and, ultimately, to prevent Venus from experiencing the same fate that planet Earth did with the fall of Adam and Eve.

So what does Lewis' science fiction book have to do with the final *LOST* episode? I noticed some interesting parallels.

In the final season of *LOST*, a figure who, in flashbacks, is presented as one of the first inhabitants of the island is described variously as the man in black or the smoke monster. He seems to represent a force of evil, and after the death of John Locke, who has been one of the leaders of the castaways, this man in black inhabits and animates Locke's body. Just as Ransom, on *Perelandra*, recognizes that the "person" he is speaking to has Weston's form but is not the real Weston, the characters in *LOST* come to recognize that while the "person" they are speaking to looks like their fellow crash survivor, John Locke, he is not the real John Locke. So, for example, as "Locke" and Jack Shephard lower Desmond down into the cave, "Locke" asks Jack if this reminds him of a previous event, and Jack responds, "You're not John Locke." One of the *LOST* blogs referred to this being as "Un-Locke" to distinguish him from the real John Locke. It's a clever name, but C. S. Lewis had the idea first. In *Perelandra*, after Weston's body is inhabited by the dark power, the narrator of the book and Ransom refer to him as the "Un-man."

Another parallel can be seen in the presentation of the two heroes: Elwin Ransom, in *Perelandra*, and Jack Shephard, in *LOST*. Jack Shephard is asked to protect the island, a duty for which he volunteers but a role for which Jacob (not to mention the viewers) seems to have always known that he was preparing. (Jacob, who seems to represent the good force as contrasted with the evil force of his brother, the man in black, is the other ancient inhabitant of the island.) In Lewis' novel, Ransom slowly comes to the realization that if *Perelandra* is to be saved, he will be the one to save it. At a turning point in the story, Ransom finally understands that he is the one called by God for the job (Lewis, 144-46). Like Moses in the biblical Exodus story, he protests that he is not qualified for the role, but he ultimately accepts it as his destiny; just as Jack, in spite of his failed attempts and the mistakes he has made as

a leader, accepts that this is the end the story has been pointing to all along. In another interesting connection, the name of the hero in each story is significant. In *Perelandra*, in a pivotal scene in Chapter 11 where Elwin Ransom is coming to the realization of the role he is destined to play, Lewis puns on his hero's name. The voice of God speaks to remind the philologist that "my name is also Ransom" (Lewis, 148). The writers of the *LOST* series also have a tendency to use characters' names symbolically. It is no accident, for example, that Jack has the last name Shephard, underscoring his role as leader and protector of the flock of survivors on the mysterious island.

Perhaps the closest parallel between the two works, though, is the physical nature of the battle between good and evil that serves as the climax for both *LOST* and *Perelandra*. Much of Un-Locke's ability to control the other inhabitants of the island results from his invincibility. He can walk through explosions and a spray of bullets unharmed. In fact, when Un-Locke arrives for his rendezvous with Jack, Kate shoots him repeatedly, to no avail. While Weston's body in *Perelandra* is not seen as invincible, Ransom assumes, for a long time, that physical action against the Un-man would be futile. He, therefore, focuses his efforts on trying to persuade the Green Lady not to listen to the Un-man through logic and argument. Ultimately, though, Ransom realizes that his only chance of protecting *Perelandra* is for him to kill Weston, or at least, Weston's body. Ransom reasons (rightly as it turns out) that without a body to inhabit, the dark power will be unable to remain on *Perelandra*. While not stated as explicitly in the television series, it is implied that Jack and Kate reach the same conclusion about Un-Locke since they are so intent on killing him.

In *LOST*, the interesting twist is that after Desmond disrupts the light source and the island begins to deteriorate, Un-Locke is no longer invincible. Jack realizes this when he tackles and hits Un-Locke, drawing blood, and Kate realizes it too since she shoots Un-Locke just before he sinks his knife into Jack's throat. In *Perelandra*, Ransom reasons that in physical capabilities,

he and Weston are similar (“one middle-aged, sedentary body against another,” as he puts it); therefore, he has an even chance of defeating the Un-man in physical combat (Lewis, 146).

In addition to these larger motifs, there are some smaller details that connect the two stories. In both stories when the hero defeats the evil force, he throws the body off of a cliff. Even stranger, in *Perelandra*, Ransom’s only lasting physical wound from the battle with the Un-man is a bleeding heel, which continues to bleed even after Ransom’s return to earth. This detail has reminded some readers of the Genesis passage, where God addresses the serpent: “He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15, NRSV).

In *LOST*, the last few episodes show Jack with a cut on his throat that gradually worsens. In the finale, we learn where he got the cut—from Un-Locke’s knife. Whether these are mere coincidences or not, I cannot say with certainty. But given the writer/producers’ penchant for borrowing from other literatures and mythologies, I doubt it.

It is interesting to speculate, though impossible to answer, what Lewis, were he still with us, might think of a popular television series like *LOST*. However, I will offer an opinion based on what I take to be the genre of the show. *LOST* resembles no genre so closely as myth. It is full of classic archetypes, miraculous events, and characters who symbolize something or someone beyond themselves, and it ends with a battle between good

and evil forces. In other words, it is a descendant of that kind of literature that Tolkien and Lewis loved to read and that they wrote in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. I think both Tolkien and Lewis would have appreciated the themes of loyalty, friendship, and community that *LOST* embodies. I know Lewis (based on his presentation of Ransom in the trilogy) would have admired Jack’s sense of calling and his willingness, in the end, to sacrifice himself for the good of the island and his friends. Jack says to Desmond in the finale, “What we do here matters.” It’s a statement worthy of Tolkien and Lewis, two masters who knew without a doubt that what happens in the fantasy world matters very much indeed.

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The Chronicles of Narnia are one of four British fantasy series selected for the Royal Mail’s new ‘Magical Realms’ stamp collection. The stamps feature Aslan and the White Witch from Narnia, Dumbledore and Voldemort from Harry Potter, Merlin and Morgan LeFay from Arthurian Legend, and Nanny Ogg and Rincewind from Discworld.

