



# The Silver Chair

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*Illustrations by Pauline Baynes*

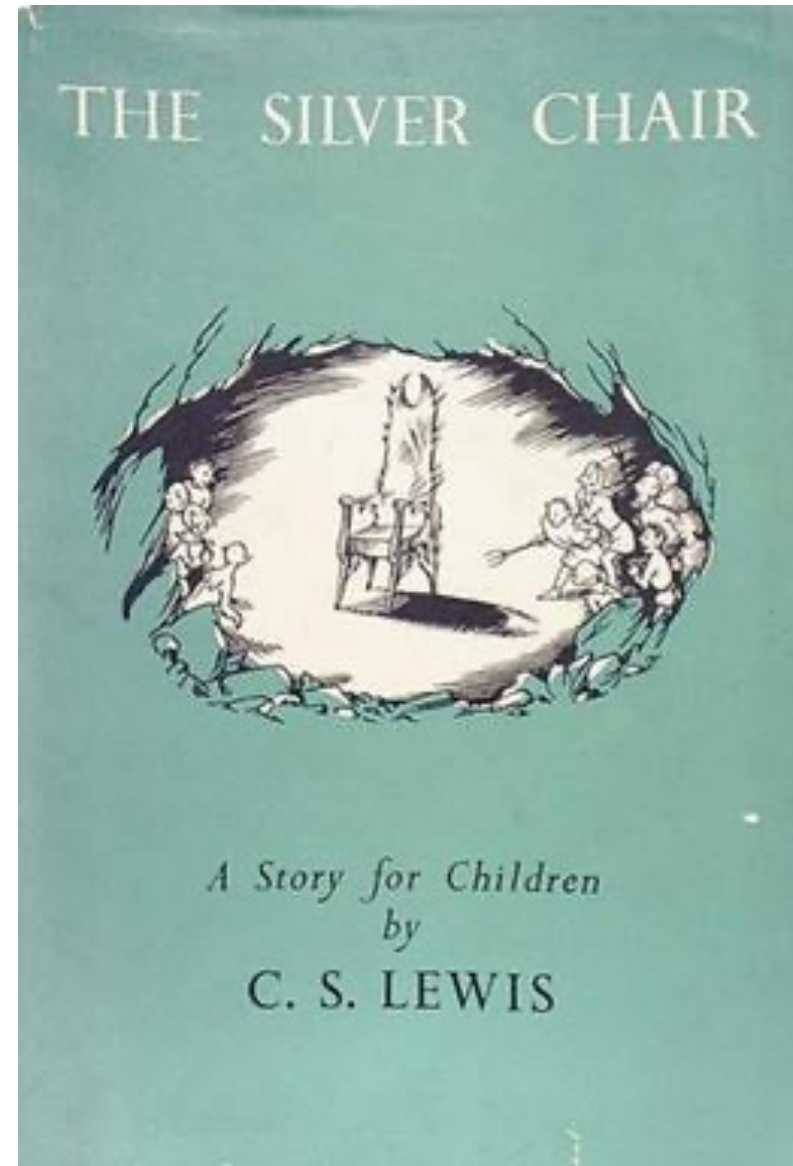
# What are we looking for tonight?

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- Images and ideas that can “move both ways,” particularly ones which Lewis intended us to find in the book and to take back into our own lives.
- This seeking is the point of Narnia—as Aslan says in DT: “In your world, I have another name. You must learn to know me by it. That was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.”
- I propose that of all the Narnia books, *The Silver Chair* is the one with the most to give to us in this way, and for that reason it is my favorite.
- *Read pg 17*— “I have swallowed up...”

- Published Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>, 1953
- The Fourth of the Narnia books
- The book after *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, which Lewis had intended to be his last.
- Beautifully illustrated by Pauline Baynes



- We can assume the book is set in 1942, based on the chronology set off of LWW, which took place in 1940 (during the Blitz).
- The essential plot points:
  - Eustace Scrubb and a picked-on Jill Pole are being bullied at Experiment House.
  - They ask Aslan to go to Narnia.
  - They are taken to Aslan's country, where Jill promptly causes Eustace to fall off a cliff.
  - They are given the task of rescuing the lost Prince Rilian or perish in the attempt, and signs to accompany that task.
  - They go to Narnia, where the quest starts badly and the pair are given little more than the aid of Puddleglum the Marshwiggle.
  - Together the party fares North, through many perils, until they fall (literally) underground where they are captured by "the earthmen," who are in the service of the Emerald Witch who is keeping a mysteriously enchanted knight for a nefarious plot to conquer Narnia from below.
  - The knight, who of course is Rilian, must be bound every night in a magic Silver Chair. For an hour he is mad (or sane?).
  - The group sets him free, they confront the witch, and Puddleglum's loyalty (and soggy feet) save them from her enchantment. Rilian slays her when she is in the form of a snake.
  - The group escapes through Underland as it collapses (looking into the yet deeper world of Bism), until they travel through the tunnel intended for Narnia's invasion and return.
  - Rilian is reunited with his father Caspian, who promptly dies.
  - The children return to Aslan's country, where they witness Caspian restored to life by Aslan.
  - Aslan, Caspian, and the children return to our world, where Experiment House is given a lesson (by Aslan, Caspian, and the now-tough kids) that transforms the school.

# This Raises the Question

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- *Who is rescued in The Silver Chair?*
- Discuss!



# There is more than one answer...

- Rilian
- Caspian
- Narnia
- Eustace
- But (in my opinion) the best answer is...

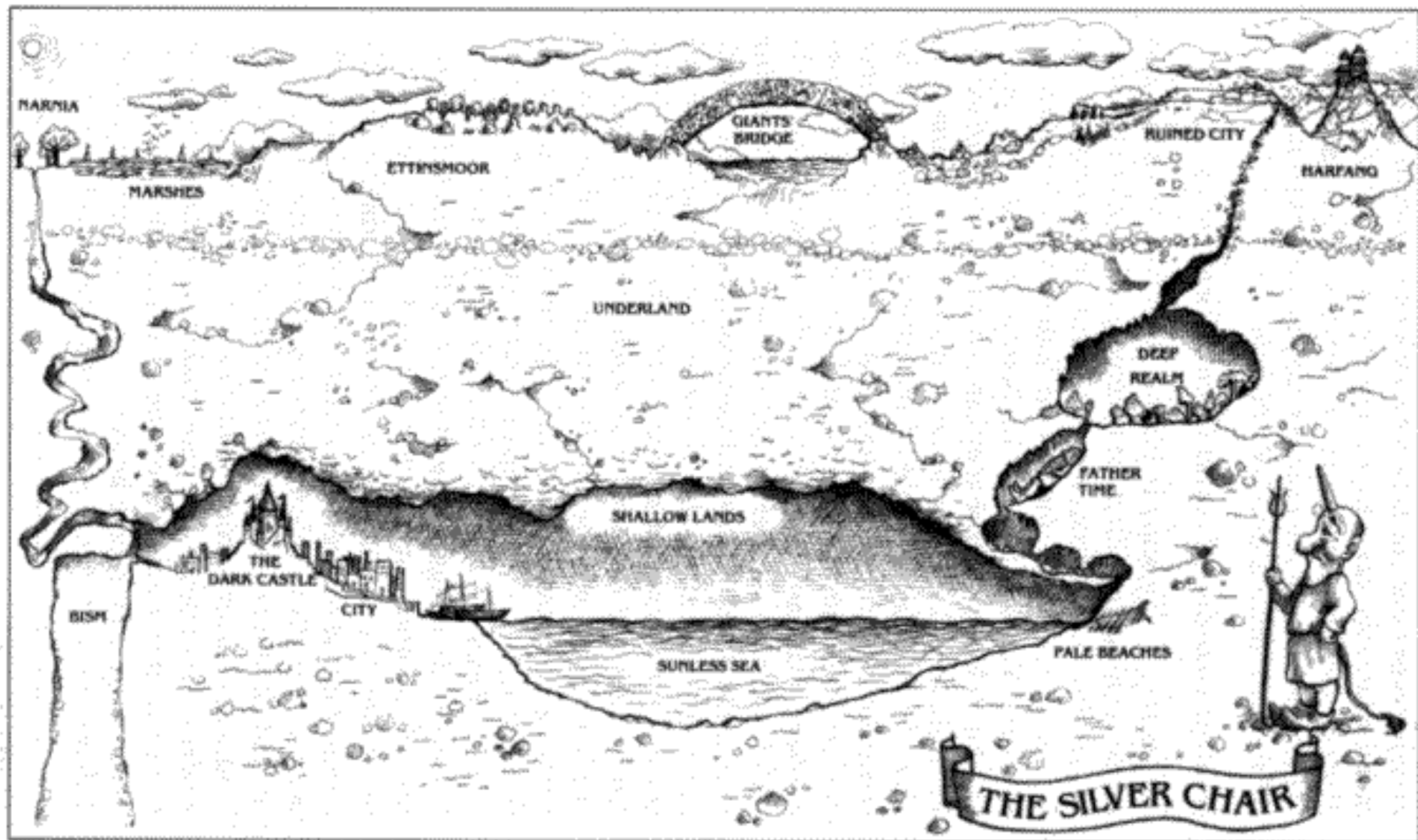
# Jill Pole



# Why?

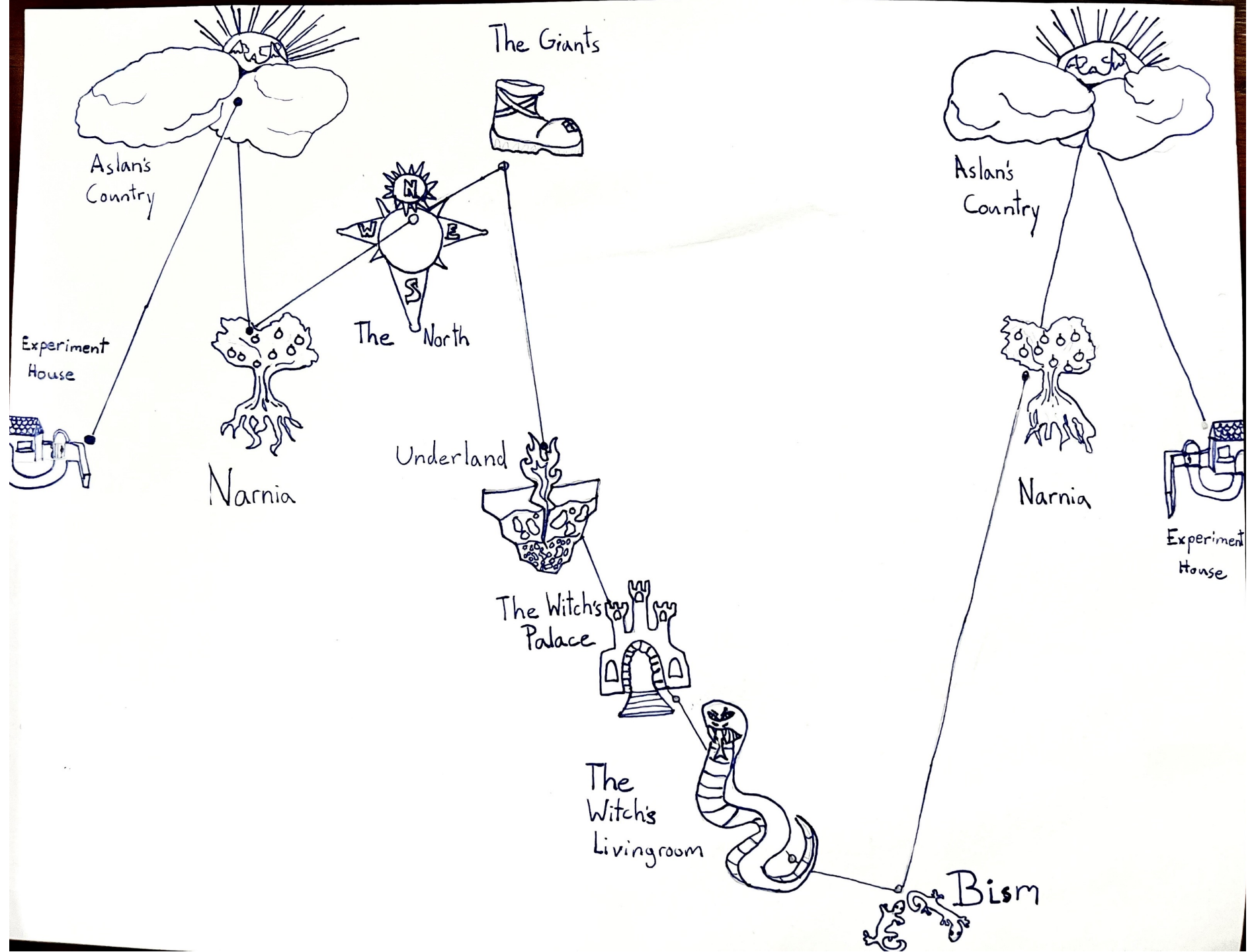
- She is the only “dynamic” character in the book, as Eustace was in DT. She is the only character who meaningfully changes *as a character*.
- She is the only character who participates in every scene. Even Eustace and Puddleglum can come and go for Lewis. Jill *must* be there.
- If this is true, then we must look to her as the key to the story—she is the centerpoint of the plot’s conflict and resolution.





# This leaves out the most important parts!

- Aslan's Country
- Experiment House
- (One of the cardinal rules of storytelling is that the beginning and end have outsized meaning!)





# Then what?

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- This is a rescue-from-enchantment story
- But the Emerald Witch is only the *secondary* villain
- If Jill is the central character, than the true story is happening in what nearly all of us mostly ignore when we read the book (and what was missing from the map!): *Experiment House*
- But perhaps both are pointing us to the same sort of story?



Emerald Witch	Experiment House
Uses false words to “enchant”/dominate	Uses false words to “enchant”/dominate
Torments the innocent	Torments the innocent
Makes you feel there is something wrong with you, that “you’re the crazy one”	Makes you feel there is something wrong with you, that “you’re the crazy one”
“Mixes up”/confuses	“Mixes up”/confuses
Looks good on the surface	Looks good on the surface



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- Lewis is talking about something foundational—**deliverance from the danger/bondage that occurs when people begin using words the wrong way.** (Hold that for a moment. We'll come back to it.)

# Symbolism of the “Emerald” Witch

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- *Green* is deeply changeable—it is life *and* poison, sprouts *and* decay. It is uniquely suited to deception—**what looks like life is death.**
- *Emerald* has a rich symbolic history, which Lewis the Medieval scholar would have known well:
  - Not the green of soft life, but hard and sharp.
  - The stone sacred to Hermes, who conducted the dead to the Underworld
  - The stone of “occult knowledge,” an emerald fell from Lucifer’s head when he fell from Heaven, according to the Hermetic traditions
  - Manifestation of power—if placed on the tongue (Medieval tradition) one could perform magic or summon spirits
  - The Christian lapidary associated it with “the most dangerous inhabitants of Hell”
  - Think of Harry Potter/Green and black are the colors of Slytherin, symbolized by a serpent



# Symbolism of Silver (*From Penguin Ref.*)

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- Corresponds to the moon—  
Lunacy
- Water and the underground. Metal of darkness and night (opposed to gold, which is of light and the sun).
- Passivity
- CLARITY--*that kind of madness that tells the truth*







What is the significance of Bism? *Discuss*

# In Bism

- Lewis redeems “the depths” for us.
- The evil enchantress is foreign here—there is something deeper still, and *good*.
- We are put in mind of the “Deeper Magic” of LWW here—Lewis’s firm belief is that at the “bottom” of it all is goodness.
- This is the gift that Jill and Co. take back with them to the surface—the vision of Bism is what sets them free from a particular type of fear which we may likely share—*the fear of the depths*.

# If you go deep enough...

- It is warm, not cold.
  - It is light, not dark.
  - It is alive, not dead.
  - It is good, not evil.
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- **Deep symbolism! The depths belong to Aslan as much as the heights do.**

# Lewis must have thought of Romans 8:38-39

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

**Nor height, nor depth**, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord...

# And 1 Cor. 15...

- So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is **swallowed up** in victory.

# Now let's bring this all together

- Whose story? **Jill's story**
- About? **Being “eaten up.”**
- How does evil enchantment work? **Powerful “eat” the small. Looking good, but being bad. Lies not truth, Bullying, not freedom.**
- What does her journey into Underland show her? **That the deepest depths in the world are *good*. That Aslan can “swallow up” all of it.**
- What does this lead to? **Freedom.**

(By the way, who's  
at the center of  
it?)

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- Puddleglum! *Who is different on the inside than you'd expect!*
- Hopeful, not despairing!
- Encouraging, even when “glum!”



# Consider...

- Jill is used by Aslan from the highest heights to the lowest depths to set a prisoner free—this in turn liberates and changes her.
- Jill’s journey to the depths brings something to life in her that was “imprisoned” before. Her outer deliverance comes after and because of that inner deliverance.
- She sees the beauty of the “hidden depths”—in Bism, in Puddleglum, in Aslan and *in herself*.



# Now let the images bleed back into our world

- We can brave the depths of our soul and of the world, believing that the deepest depths are good.
- We can be Jill and be Puddleglum—faithful despite our character flaws and mindset, by simply faithfully doing the best we can.
- We can work to be discerning between what a thing *looks* like and what a thing *is*.
- There is hope!



*Questions? Comments?*