

7. The Last Battle (Summary)

A False Aslan

At Caldron Pool beyond Lantern Waste, on the western edge of Narnia, an ape named Shift and a donkey named Puzzle find a lion's skin that has washed down a waterfall. Shift proposes to make a winter coat for Puzzle, but the donkey thinks it would be disrespectful to Aslan to wear a lion-skin. Clever Shift reminds the dull-witted donkey, "You're no good at thinking ... why don't you let me do your thinking for you?" Puzzle concedes, and Shift sews the coat with the lion's head still on it then ties it onto the donkey. "If anyone saw you now, they'd think you were Aslan, the great Lion, himself," boasts Shift, which Puzzle thinks would be awful. Shift disagrees, saying: "everyone would do whatever you told them." He persuades Puzzle to impersonate Aslan, promising he will "think of sensible orders" for Puzzle to give.

Three weeks later King Tirian ("the last of the Kings of Narnia") and his companion Jewel the Unicorn are staying in the forest near Lantern Waste when they hear rumors that Aslan has returned to Narnia. They are overjoyed by the news, but soon Roonwit the Centaur arrives and cautions them that the tales must certainly be untrue. The omens in the stars tell only of forthcoming disaster, the centaur warns, stating, "The stars never lie, but Men and Beasts do." A distraught dryad (tree spirit) approaches, mourning "Woe for the holy trees! The woods are laid waste." She calls on Tirian for justice against those who are cutting down the trees nearby, killing her sisters, and then she dies, her own tree chopped down at its source miles away. King Tirian wants to immediately set out to apprehend the perpetrators, but Roonwit cautions that the three of them would not be of much use against a large number of enemies. The king refuses to wait, though, and sends Roonwit to Cair Paravel to gather reinforcements.

King Tirian and Jewel set off toward Lantern Waste, and soon come upon a raft of newly cut trunks being poled down the river by a water-rat. The rat informs them the cargo is headed toward Calormene for sale, under the orders of "Aslan himself." Tirian and Jewel are dumbfounded, unable to believe Aslan could do such a thing. They then come to a clearing where trees are being felled, and half of the workforce is from Calormene, "that great and cruel country" to the south, and a sometime enemy of Narnia. When Tirian realizes the horses set to work on dragging the logs are talking horses, he loses his head in rage, and he and Jewel kill two of the Calormene guards.

The King in Captivity

Surrounded by Calormenes, King Tirian and Jewel quickly flee the scene to safety, but soon, ashamed of their behavior, they return to the logging camp and turn themselves in to receive "the justice of Aslan." Shift, now called "Lord Shift, mouthpiece of Aslan," is busy issuing commands and insults. He orders the squirrels to bring more nuts from their dwindling supplies and then rejects a boar's request to see Aslan for himself. Shift proclaims that from then on, everyone will work, for "Aslan has it all settled with the King of Calormene—The Tisroc." Many will be sent to Calormene to work in the mines and fields, he says, and "your pay will be paid in to Aslan's treasury and he will use it for everybody's good." The animals argue they would rather be free, and a lamb objects that Aslan could never be friends with Tash, the bloodthirsty god of the Calormenes. Shift mocks the lamb harshly, stating that Tash and Aslan are actually the same being, which is why "there can never be any quarrel between them." The Narnians are bewildered, and King Tirian cries out that Shift is a liar. His men beat the king and knock him out, and Shift screams at them to take him away.

King Tirian awakens that night, firmly bound to a tree, sore, bleeding, and hungry. Jewel is nowhere to be found. A small pack of loyal woodland animals arrives secretly to feed and care for him, but they won't untie him for fear of angering Aslan. They tell the king how Aslan comes out at night so the people can see him,

emerging from a stable at the top of a hill for just a few minutes. The disillusioned animals never imagined Aslan would be so cruel, and they suppose he must be punishing Narnia for some unknown transgression. The animals scurry away as a bonfire is lit atop Stable Hill a short distance away. Tirian sees "Aslan" emerge from the stable, surprised the revered, legendary lion is only a "stiff thing which stood and said nothing." It's hard to believe the creature is truly Aslan, but he can't be sure that it isn't, either.

Once "Aslan" retreats to the stable, Tirian reflects on Narnia's storied history, and how in ancient times human children would come to help in times of need. He cries out first to Aslan and then to the children to come and aid Narnia once more, and immediately he falls into a state of vision. Before him appears the image of seven humans seated together, friends of Narnia, but Tirian is unable to speak. The vision fades and he returns to his senses; it is "the worst moment he had ever had in his life." In just a few moments, though, two human children appear from nowhere and cut his bonds. It is Jill Pole and Eustace Scrubb, the legendary rescuers of Prince Rilian from days of old. The trio quickly steals away, heading toward an unused watchtower nearby as the sun rises. The children explain that the seven people Tirian saw in his vision were themselves, Peter Pevensie, Edmund Pevensie, Lucy Pevensie, Polly Plummer, and Digory Kirke, but only Jill and Eustace are young enough to return to Narnia. They arrive at the deserted watchtower, where they find an assortment of weapons and armor, including Calormene gear. They have a meager meal of dried biscuits and water and then rest for some hours.

That night, the three put on the Calormene armor and use a special juice to tint their skin to a darker, Calormene complexion. They return to Stable Hill in a covert mission to search for Jewel. The children hide while Tirian easily overcomes the lounging guard, who leads the king to the unicorn. Meanwhile, Jill sees her chance to investigate the stable, where she finds the miserable Puzzle (the false Aslan) and leads him into the forest to regroup with the Eustace and Tirian. The donkey—sorry for his part in all that has happened—reveals the ape's ploy. Just then the group hears a troupe of dwarfs marching nearby, and Tirian decides to go forth and meet them. With Puzzle as proof of Shift's lies, the king is certain the dwarfs will rally to his side and Shift and the Calormenes will be quickly dealt with.

This, however, is not what happens. Tirian confronts the dwarfs and their Calormene guards, who are marching the captives off to the mines. The king trots out Puzzle in his lion-skin to prove Shift has deceived them all, and together with the dwarfs, they kill the guards. Following the scuffle, though, Tirian's cry of "Three cheers for Aslan!" is met with disturbing silence. The dwarfs, sore at having been fooled by the false Aslan, are skeptical that Jill and Eustace are who they say they are. And anyway, "I've heard as much about Aslan as I want to for the rest of my life," growls their leader, Gruffle. Rather than join sides with Tirian to fight Shift, the dwarfs decide to go their own way. "No more Aslan, no more kings, no more silly stories about other worlds," they proclaim. The dwarfs are only out for themselves now, and they set off into the forest, leaving behind a very disheartened king and companions. Only one dwarf, Poggin, turns back to join their party.

The group returns to the tower for some rest and a meal, and Poggin fills them in on the situation at Stable Hill. The devious cat Ginger has convinced the people that Tirian has been eaten alive by Aslan. Shift, who has started drinking heavily, has himself become a puppet to Ginger and the Calormene captain Rishda, just as Puzzle has been Shift's puppet. Neither Ginger nor Rishda believe in either Aslan or Tash; they are simply out for themselves and material gain. Suddenly, the sunny day clouds over, the temperature drops drastically, and a foul smell greets them. In the forest nearby passes a horrifying vision: the vulture-headed Calormene god Tash has come to Narnia. After the gruesome god passes, Poggin gloats that Tash's arrival will be a big shock for Shift and the Calormenes. "People shouldn't call for demons unless they really mean what they say," he says.

Into the Stable

The group decides to head eastward to link up with Roonwit the Centaur and the reinforcing army he has surely raised by now. They don't get far before the eagle Farsight arrives with grim tidings: Roonwit is dead, having never reached Cair Paravel, and the castle has been overtaken by invading Calormenes. "Narnia is no more," says the king, and all are silent for a time. They now realize Shift must have been scheming with the Calormenes for much longer than they suspected. They decide to go to Stable Hill and expose Shift's lies anyway, taking "the adventure that Aslan would send them." The group hunkers down in the forest near the hill and awaits the nightly bonfire, where they plan to dramatically reveal Puzzle in his lion-skin to incite an uprising against Shift.

The ape steals their thunder, though, by announcing to the crowd that a donkey is clothed "in a lion-skin and is wandering ... in these very woods pretending to be Aslan." The crowd is outraged. Tirian and the others realize their original plan will never work now, so Jill cuts the lion-skin off Puzzle to prevent his being harmed. Shift then announces that Aslan will no longer be coming out at night to be viewed, cleverly covering the fact that he no longer has Puzzle to show off to the crowd. Instead, anyone who wants to see "Tashlan" (for it is now no longer simply Aslan, but Tash and Aslan put together) must enter the stable himself. Shift then warns that Tashlan is in a fearsome mood, and likely to eat anyone who enters. "Now then! Who's first?" he questions.

Naturally, the animals shy away, afraid to enter the stable. The first to step forward is Ginger the Cat, who already knows what is inside—or so he thinks. He strolls casually to the door, but as soon as he enters, the cat shrieks and streaks back out into the night air. He tries to speak of what he has seen, but alas, he transforms before their eyes from a talking beast back into a dumb animal. Now the crowd is truly terrified, and the animals beg Shift to "stand between us and Aslan." One, however, still wishes to enter the stable. The Calormene soldier Emeth declares he is ready to die "if [he] might look once on the face of Tash." Rishda tries to dissuade him, but the dwarfs cry out, "Why do you let Narnians in and keep your own people out?" Rishda is forced to let Emeth enter the stable, and moments later, a soldier in armor staggers out and falls on the ground, dead. Rishda declares "he has looked on Tash and is dead."

Shift then tries to force a boar into the stable, and at last, Tirian can take no more. The group emerges from hiding and loudly denounces Shift and the Calormenes, asking "all true Narnians" to join with him "in Aslan's name." The fight commences, and right away, Tirian picks up and tosses Shift into the stable. A blinding light erupts, the ground shakes, and they hear a hideous voice as the ape disappears into the dark room. The talking dogs join Tirian's side, while the treacherous dwarfs under Gruffle's command shoot down the loyal talking horses. Just as it looks like the Narnians might be winning, more Calormene troops pour into the battle, and the slaughter worsens. Eustace is captured and thrown into the stable, followed by all of the vile dwarfs. Poggin grimly predicts "that we shall all, one by one, pass through that dark door before morning," to which Jewel replies, "It may be for us the door to Aslan's country and we shall sup at his table tonight." One by one, their allies fall—the boar and Jewel, Farsight and Poggin, the loyal dogs, and countless others. King Tirian is driven toward the stable by Rishda, and before he can be forced in himself, the King grabs Rishda and pulls him inside, crying "Come in and meet Tash yourself!" Again there is "a deafening noise" and "a blinding light," and the two disappear into the darkness.

Inside, the scene is very different. It is daylight, in a beautiful country, and nearby is the stable door as seen from the inside—standing alone in the air, with no walls around it. Tirian watches as the fearsome Tash captures the groveling Rishda. Seven crowned kings and queens of Narnia then appear, and High King Peter banishes Tash to his own domain. Two of the royals are Jill and Eustace, no longer battle-dirty, but fresh and joyous-looking. Tirian, too, has transformed, and he meets all of the royals, with only Susan being absent. She is "no longer a friend of Narnia" and has ceased to believe that such a place exists. Peter and Edmund describe what was happening at the railway when they were pulled into Narnia. The train appeared to be going too fast

around a bend, then "there was a frightful roar and something hit me with a bang, but it didn't hurt," says Peter. Digory concurs, and adds that his aches and pains from being old have disappeared. All in the group seem to be closer in age to each other now, somehow, too.

Lucy then tells what they have seen since their arrival. A Calormene guard entered the door and positioned himself in waiting to kill any enemy who entered, though he could not see or hear the kings and queens. Tash then appeared and frightened the senses out of Ginger. The Calormene soldier Emeth next entered and was attacked by the sentry, whom he killed and threw back out the door. Emeth could see the kings and queens, but wandered off in a daze, unresponsive to them, still looking for Tash. Next appeared Shift, who was gobbled up in one bite by Tash; and then came the remaining disloyal dwarfs, who are still there, sitting nearby in a circle. The group approaches them, and it soon becomes clear that the dwarfs believe they are inside the dark stable; they cannot see the bright day around them. Aslan again appears, and though he provides the dwarfs with a grand feast, to them it is only trough water and unappealing fare. Nothing can make them perceive the wonders surrounding them, for they live in a "prison ... in their own minds." The lion then roars that it is "TIME," and the door bangs open.

Aslan's Country

Through the open door, there is now only blackness. Aslan roars again, and this time the giant Father Time appears and blows his horn against the sky. The stars begin to fall, deserting the sky in a shower, and soon there are no stars left to shine. "Aslan had called them home," and the star people pass through the door into Aslan's country. Then come the Narnians, and millions of beasts and creatures pour through the entrance and stream past the watching kings and queens. As each creature enters and looks into the face of Aslan, they instantly love him or hate and fear him. Those who hate him disappear into a dark shadow stretching away to the left, while those who love him veer to the right and onward into the verdant landscape. Those whom the children thought were dead appear, too, joyfully gathering around Tirian and the others. The creatures race toward the west at Roonwit's cry of "Further in and higher up!"

Beyond the doorway, the trees and plants of Narnia are destroyed by dragons and giant lizards, which then shrivel into nothingness themselves, with only skeletons remaining. Finally, a roaring wall of water floods toward the door and covers the land, and the red, dying sun and the moon rise for the last time, merging together into a flaming ball. Father Time reaches up and squeezes it into extinction, and Aslan commands Peter to shut the door. It is done. The world has ended.

"Come further in! Come further up!" Aslan urges, and they all proceed westward until the pack of dogs pick up an out-of-place scent: the Calormene soldier Emeth. They gather around him and Lucy asks for his story. He tells how, at first, he was delighted with the idea of war with Narnia. Soon, though, he came to see that it would not be honorable combat on the field of battle, but rather an infiltration of the land through lies and deception. The idea that Aslan and Tash were the same being was deplorable to him, as he had served Tash all his life and hated Aslan. When Puzzle was displayed to the crowds, Emeth instantly knew the donkey was no god. So when Shift invited the crowd into the shed to view "Tashlan," the soldier resolved to find out the truth for himself—especially after Ginger was so genuinely frightened by whatever was inside. "Surely the true Tash, whom they called on without knowledge or belief, has now come," he thought. Willing to face death to see his god, Emeth entered the stable, and there found the waiting soldier, whom he killed in self-defense and threw back out the door.

Believing he had come to Tash's country, Emeth set off to seek his god, but found instead the great lion, Aslan. Overwhelmed by the beast's greatness, Emeth fell at his feet, expecting to be slain for having served Tash all his life, but instead Aslan welcomes him. "All the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me,"

the lion said, then explaining that he and Tash are not one, but opposites. Only vile acts can be performed in Tash's service, and only good acts can be performed in Aslan's. Because Emeth has lived a life of noble virtues, he has actually served Aslan rather than Tash.

Puzzle then approaches and is greeted warmly. Together, the group turns westward once more among the other creatures heading in that direction. The land is fresh and lovely, and soon the people begin to recognize the mountains and hills of Narnia around them. The features are similar to those landmarks, but somehow "more like the real thing," Digory remarks. It is soon evident that they are indeed in Narnia remade, the same and yet different. It is "the real Narnia," and the Narnia they had known was "only a shadow or a copy" of this place. Peter assures Lucy that "all of the Old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures" have now come into this place, Aslan's country. Similarly, every other world exists there, too, only "deeper" and more "real," including the kings' and queens' home world and England.

At last they know that they have come to their final home, and they bound forward at a run, "further up ... further in!" They race straight up the great waterfall, defying gravity, through the Western Wild, and at last come to the walled garden where Digory had plucked the Apple of Life so long ago. They come to the golden gates, and a horn sounds; the gates swing open—and out comes Reepicheep! The talking mouse had indeed found the "utter East" he set out to find in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, and the new arrivals greet him joyfully. Tirian's long-gone father King Erlian is there, too, once again young and hearty, as well as Fledge the winged horse, Puddleglum the Marsh-wiggle, Tumnus the Faun, and scores of other old friends. In the center of the orchard are King Frank and Queen Helen, enthroned, almost as if they were "Adam and Eve in all their glory."

Looking over the garden wall, Lucy realizes that, just like the stable, the world within the garden walls is far larger on the inside. "The further up and the further in you go, the bigger everything gets," says Tumnus. There are worlds within worlds, each inner world larger than the last. Looking about the land surrounding the garden, Lucy recognizes England and calls for her friends. It is just as they had remembered. Moreover, the Pevensie's parents are now approaching, too—all will be reunited further up the great mountains nearby. Aslan meets them halfway up, speaks first with Puzzle in private, and then assures Lucy they will not be sent back home ever again. The railway accident in England was real, and they have all now come to live forever in Aslan's country; they have died in their own world, only to be reborn in His. And "for them it was only the beginning of the real story," the Great Story that never ends.