The Magician's Nephew

by C.S. Lewis · Language: EN

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Overview

The Magician's Nephew" by C.S. Lewis serves as the foundational prequel to "The Chronicles of Narnia," unraveling the intricate origins of the magical world. The story begins in Victorian London, introducing Digory Kirke and Polly Plummer, two curious children who stumble upon Digory's eccentric and morally ambiguous Uncle Andrew. Through Uncle Andrew's experimental magic, the children are unwittingly transported to the Wood Between the Worlds, a tranquil, dreamlike place connecting countless other realities. Their adventure takes a perilous turn when they enter the dying world of Charn, where Digory, against Polly's warnings, awakens Queen Jadis, a powerful and malevolent sorceress who had brought about the destruction of her own world with a single, devastating "Deplorable Word."

Jadis is inadvertently brought back to London, causing widespread chaos and demonstrating her ruthless nature. In a desperate attempt to escape her wrath, Digory, Polly, Uncle Andrew, Jadis, a cabby named Frank, and his horse, Strawberry, are all pulled into another new, empty world. Here, they witness the awe-inspiring creation of Narnia by the majestic Lion, Aslan, whose song breathes life into the land and its creatures. Jadis, now known as the White Witch, attempts to corrupt Narnia from its very inception, planting seeds of evil. Digory is tasked by Aslan with a quest to retrieve a magical apple from a distant garden, an act crucial for Narnia's protection. Along the way, he faces temptation, learning profound lessons about choice, responsibility, and the nature of good and evil. The book culminates in the establishment of Narnia's first king and queen, the planting of the protective Tree of Life, and the children's return to London, bringing a magical cure for Digory's ailing mother, thus setting the stage for the entire Narnian saga.

Key Takeaways

- Curiosity can open doors to both wonder and unforeseen dangers, requiring careful discernment.
- The choices made in moments of temptation have profound and lasting consequences.
- True power lies not in domination but in selfless creation and protection.
- Even small acts of kindness and courage can contribute to the greater good.
- Understanding the origins of a world reveals the fundamental struggle between good and evil.
- Selfishness and the pursuit of personal gain often lead to isolation and misery.

• Forgiveness and redemption are possible, but they require genuine remorse and a change of heart.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1: The Wrong Door

In London, during a wet summer, Digory Kirke and Polly Plummer, two lonely children, become friends and explore the attics connecting their row houses. They accidentally stumble into the forbidden study of Digory's eccentric Uncle Andrew, who is a magician. Uncle Andrew, a selfish and manipulative man, tricks Polly into touching a yellow magic ring, which instantly makes her disappear to another world. Digory is horrified and demands to know what happened, but his uncle is more interested in his magical experiment than Polly's safety.

Chapter 2: Digory and His Uncle

Digory confronts Uncle Andrew about Polly's disappearance. Uncle Andrew, a self-proclaimed 'great scholar' and 'magician,' reveals that he has sent Polly to a 'different world' using magic rings he created from dust from another dimension. He manipulates Digory, appealing to his sense of responsibility and curiosity, into taking a green ring to follow Polly and bring her back. Digory is reluctant and scared but feels compelled to go, knowing Polly is alone and in danger in an unknown place. Uncle Andrew provides no real guidance, only vague instructions and a warning not to touch the green rings until he is ready to return.

Chapter 3: The Wood Between the Worlds

Digory uses a green ring and finds himself in a peaceful, dreamlike forest with many small pools of water. He quickly finds Polly, who is initially angry with him for following her. They realize this 'Wood Between the Worlds' is a nexus, and each pool leads to a different universe. They deduce that the yellow rings are for entering new worlds and the green rings for returning to the Wood. Before attempting to go home, they decide to explore one of the other worlds, driven by curiosity and a sense of adventure, choosing a pool that looks particularly inviting.

Chapter 4: The Bell and the Hammer

Digory and Polly jump into a new pool and arrive in a desolate, dying city under a red sun, in a world called Charn. They explore a vast, silent palace, finding a great hall filled with statues of ancient kings and queens, each more magnificent and terrifying than the last. The final statue is of a beautiful, cruel-looking woman. In the center of the hall, they find a pillar with a small golden bell and a hammer, bearing an inscription warning against striking it. Despite Polly's strong objections and premonitions of danger, Digory's curiosity and a strange compulsion lead him to strike the bell.

Chapter 5: The Deplorable Word

Striking the bell shatters the magical sleep of the last queen, Jadis, the beautiful and terrible woman from the final statue. She awakens and reveals herself as the Empress Jadis, who, in a civil war against her sister, used a powerful spell called the 'Deplorable Word' to destroy all life on Charn, including her own people, rather than surrender. She boasts of her immense power and cruelty, showing no remorse for her actions. Digory and Polly are horrified by her cold-blooded confession and realize the immense danger they are in.

Chapter 6: The Beginning of Uncle Andrew's Troubles

Jadis, now awake, demands to be taken to Digory and Polly's world. The children try to escape her, but she is incredibly strong and fast. As they attempt to use their rings to return to the Wood Between the Worlds, Jadis grabs onto Polly's hair, pulling herself along with them. They arrive back in London, where Jadis is initially overwhelmed by the new sensations but quickly recovers and begins to assert her dominance. She is fascinated by the new world and its potential for conquest, immediately causing a disturbance.

Chapter 7: What Happened at the Front Door

Jadis, now in London, causes chaos by attempting to command a hansom cab driver and then stealing his horse. She encounters Uncle Andrew, who is instantly captivated by her beauty and regal bearing, despite her destructive actions. Uncle Andrew, a vain and cowardly man, is completely enthralled and terrified by Jadis, becoming her subservient admirer. He tries to impress her with his magical knowledge, but Jadis dismisses him as a mere dabbler. She continues to cause a public disturbance, attracting a crowd and the police.

Chapter 8: The Fight at the Lamp-post

Jadis, enraged by the London crowd and the police, rips a crossbar from a newly installed lamp-post, wielding it as a weapon. She uses her immense strength to scatter the crowd and injure a policeman. Digory and Polly, desperate to get her out of their world, try to force her back to the Wood Between the Worlds. In the ensuing chaos, Uncle Andrew, the hansom cab driver Frank, and his horse Strawberry are accidentally caught by the magic rings and pulled along with Jadis, Digory, and Polly as they vanish from London.

Chapter 9: The Founding of Narnia

The group, including Jadis, Uncle Andrew, Frank, Strawberry, Digory, and Polly, arrive in a new, dark, empty world. They witness the creation of Narnia by Aslan, a magnificent Lion, who sings it into existence. As Aslan sings, stars appear, then mountains, valleys, rivers, and trees sprout from the ground. Finally, animals emerge from the earth and begin to move and grow. The children are awestruck, but Jadis is filled with fear and hatred for Aslan, while Uncle Andrew is terrified and bewildered.

Chapter 10: The First Joke and Other Matters

Aslan continues his song, and some of the newly created animals are chosen to become Talking Beasts, endowed with reason and speech. He gives them a solemn warning about choosing good over evil, emphasizing the importance of their new gift. Uncle Andrew is terrified, hearing only roaring beasts and unable to comprehend their speech. Jadis, in a fit of rage, throws the iron bar she brought from London at Aslan, but it harmlessly bounces off him and, upon hitting the ground, grows into a fully lit lamp-post, a strange new feature in the pristine world.

Chapter 11: Digory and His Uncle Are Both in Trouble

Aslan addresses Digory directly, asking him about Jadis and his role in bringing evil into the newly created Narnia. Digory, filled with shame and remorse, confesses how he awakened Jadis and brought her from Charn. Aslan, with a mix of sternness and compassion, explains the gravity of Digory's actions. To protect Narnia from Jadis's influence, Aslan tasks Digory with a quest: he must travel to a mysterious garden in the Western Wilds and retrieve a magical apple.

Chapter 12: Digory's Journey to the Edge of the World

Digory, accompanied by Polly, and carried by the cabby Frank and his horse Strawberry (who has been transformed into a magnificent winged horse named Fledge by Aslan), embarks on the quest to retrieve the apple. They fly high above the newly created Narnia, marveling at its pristine beauty and the vast, untouched landscapes. Fledge, eager to serve Aslan, carries them swiftly towards the distant mountains and the edge of the world, where the magical garden is said to be located.

Chapter 13: An Unexpected Meeting

Digory, Polly, and Fledge reach the garden, which is surrounded by high, beautiful walls. Inside, they find a tree bearing silver apples. To Digory's dismay, he discovers Jadis already there, having found her own way. She has eaten one of the apples, which she believes will give her eternal youth and power. Jadis attempts to tempt Digory into taking an apple for his dying mother, or for himself, or to abandon Polly, trying to corrupt him and make him disobey Aslan's instructions. Digory, despite his longing to help his mother, resists her cunning temptations.

Chapter 14: The Planting of the Tree

Digory, having resisted Jadis's temptations, takes one of the silver apples and returns to Aslan, successfully completing his quest. Jadis makes a final, desperate attempt to steal the apple from him, but Digory holds firm. Aslan explains that the apple Jadis ate will indeed give her eternal life, but it will also bring her eternal misery and a burning hatred for all good. The apple Digory brought is then planted by Aslan, and it immediately grows into a magnificent tree, the Tree of Protection, which will guard Narnia from Jadis for centuries.

Chapter 15: The End of This Story and the Beginning of All the Others

Aslan sends Digory and Polly back to London with a magical apple from the newly planted Tree of Protection to heal Digory's gravely ill mother. Uncle Andrew is put into a deep sleep and

returned to his study. The magic rings are buried in the garden. Digory's mother is cured by the apple, and its core grows into a magnificent apple tree in their garden. Years later, when the tree falls in a storm, its wood is used to build a wardrobe. This wardrobe, made from a tree that grew from a Narnian apple, becomes the magical portal through which the Pevensie children will later discover Narnia.

Best Quotes

“Once there was a boy called Digory and a girl called Polly and they lived in London.”

The Wrong Door

This is the opening line of the book, immediately introducing the two main child protagonists and their setting. It sets a classic fairy-tale tone for the adventure that is about to unfold, hinting at the ordinary lives that are about to become extraordinary.

“The world was so quiet you could almost hear the grass growing.”

The Wood between the Worlds

This line describes the profound stillness and peace of the Wood between the Worlds, a hub connecting different universes. It emphasizes the magical, otherworldly nature of this transitional space, distinct from the bustling worlds it links, creating a sense of wonder and calm.

“When you have been Queen of Charn, you do not easily become a nobody in London.”

The Beginning of Uncle Andrew's Troubles

Spoken by Jadis, the White Witch, this reveals her immense pride and refusal to relinquish power or importance. It explains her destructive actions in London and foreshadows her future tyranny in Narnia, driven by an insatiable lust for control and a deep-seated arrogance.

“I was the Queen, and I knew the Deplorable Word. I spoke it. And Charn perished.”

The Deplorable Word

Jadis chillingly recounts her past, revealing her ultimate act of cruelty in destroying her entire world rather than surrendering. This quote establishes her ruthless character and the immense, destructive power she wields, making her a formidable and terrifying antagonist from the outset.

“It was a rich, warm, solemn sound, and it was everywhere.”

The Founding of Narnia

This describes Aslan's song as he creates Narnia. It conveys the profound beauty, power, and spiritual significance of the creation event, emphasizing that Narnia is born not through force or

magic spells, but through divine, harmonious music that permeates every aspect of the nascent world.

“Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, awake. Love. Think. Speak. Be walking trees. Be talking beasts. Be divine waters.”

The Founding of Narnia

These are Aslan's direct commands as he sings Narnia into existence, giving life, consciousness, and speech to its natural elements and creatures. It encapsulates the essence of Narnia's unique magic and its vibrant, sentient nature from its very beginning, establishing its distinct identity.

“What have you done to Narnia?”

The First Joke and Other Matters

Aslan asks this of Digory after Jadis, the Witch, has entered the newly created Narnia and caused fear among the animals. It highlights Digory's responsibility for bringing evil into a pristine world and introduces the theme of consequences for one's actions, even if unintended.

“You have brought evil into my new world.”

The First Joke and Other Matters

Aslan's direct accusation to Digory underscores the gravity of Digory's mistake in bringing Jadis to Narnia. It establishes the concept of original sin or the introduction of corruption into a perfect creation, setting the stage for Narnia's future struggles and the need for redemption.

“The world is only beginning.”

The First Joke and Other Matters

Aslan says this to the newly created creatures of Narnia, emphasizing the fresh start and boundless potential of their world. It offers a hopeful counterpoint to the evil already introduced, suggesting that Narnia's story is just unfolding with many possibilities and a future yet to be written.

“But it was not a joke for Digory.”

The Beginning of Uncle Andrew's Troubles

This narrative comment highlights the difference in perspective between the callous Uncle Andrew, who views his actions as a game, and Digory, who understands the serious implications and dangers. It emphasizes Digory's growing moral awareness and responsibility, contrasting with his uncle's immaturity.

“That's what comes of messing about with things you don't understand.”

Digory and his Uncle

Polly says this to Digory after Uncle Andrew tricks them into using the magic rings. It serves as a warning against reckless curiosity and meddling with powerful forces, a theme central to the story as their actions have far-reaching and often dangerous consequences for multiple worlds.

“He had a very bad habit of laughing at people.”

Digory and his Uncle

This describes Uncle Andrew's character, revealing his cruel and condescending nature. It shows his lack of empathy and respect for others, which drives his manipulative behavior and makes him an unsympathetic figure, highlighting his moral failings and self-absorption.

“The problem was that he was not a good man.”

Digory and his Uncle

This direct narrative statement succinctly summarizes Uncle Andrew's moral failing. It explains why he acts selfishly and without regard for others, contrasting sharply with the innocence of the children and the inherent goodness of Aslan, providing a clear moral judgment.

“The very first joke, and the very first lie.”

The First Joke and Other Matters

This refers to the talking animals' initial misunderstanding of Uncle Andrew, whom they mistake for a talking animal, and his subsequent deceit. It signifies the introduction of misunderstanding, fear, and dishonesty into the pure, honest world of Narnia, a direct consequence of human folly.

“It was a world of trees, and trees, and trees.”

The Wood between the Worlds

This simple yet evocative description captures the endless, uniform nature of the Wood between the Worlds. It emphasizes its role as a neutral, unchanging space, a stark contrast to the diverse and dynamic worlds it connects, creating a sense of timelessness and quiet mystery.

“What a simply lovely place!”

The Wood between the Worlds

Polly's immediate reaction upon entering the Wood between the Worlds expresses her innocent delight and wonder. It highlights the initial appeal of this peaceful, magical realm before the

children's adventures lead them to more dangerous places, capturing the initial enchantment of discovery.

“The world where everything was finished and nothing new could ever happen.”

The Bell and the Hammer

This describes Charn, the dying world ruled by Jadis. It conveys a sense of ancient decay and stagnation, a stark contrast to the vibrant, newly created Narnia, and underscores the destructive nature of Jadis's reign, where life and creativity have been utterly extinguished.

“The Last Word.”

The Deplorable Word

This is Jadis's chilling term for the spell that destroyed Charn. It signifies the ultimate act of power and destruction, a final, irreversible decision that eradicates all life, revealing the terrifying extent of her ruthlessness and her willingness to sacrifice everything for control.

“For what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing: it also depends on what sort of person you are.”

Digory and his Uncle are Both Put in Their Places

This profound narrative observation explains why Uncle Andrew perceives Aslan's song as mere animal noises, while others hear divine music. It emphasizes the subjective nature of perception, influenced by one's moral character, openness to wonder, and spiritual state, highlighting the theme of spiritual blindness.

“You are not as wise as you think, nor as good as you think.”

Digory and his Uncle are Both Put in Their Places

Aslan delivers this gentle but firm rebuke to Digory, addressing his pride and the consequences of his actions. It's a key moment in Digory's moral education, teaching him humility and the importance of true wisdom over mere cleverness, guiding him towards self-awareness and redemption.

“The fruit is not for you, Digory, nor for your mother.”

An Unexpected Meeting

Aslan tells Digory that the silver apple, which Digory hopes will cure his dying mother, is not meant for personal use. This highlights the theme of selflessness and sacrifice, as Digory must prioritize Narnia's well-being over his own desperate desire, a crucial test of his character.

“It is for the protection of Narnia.”

An Unexpected Meeting

Aslan explains the true purpose of the silver apple: to create a protective barrier for Narnia against the Witch. This reveals the deeper magical significance of the fruit and reinforces the idea that some powerful things have a designated, higher purpose beyond individual desires, emphasizing divine order.

“But I know that you are now a true son of Adam.”

The Planting of the Tree

Aslan speaks these words to Digory after he resists the Witch's temptation and returns the apple. It signifies Digory's moral growth and redemption, acknowledging his integrity and courage in choosing good over selfish desire, despite his earlier mistake, and accepting his place in the Narnian story.

“And that is how the wardrobe came to be made, and that is why there was a tree in the middle of it.”

The End of This Story and the Beginning of All the Others

This narrative line connects the events of The Magician's Nephew directly to The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. It explains the origin of the magical wardrobe, revealing it was crafted from the wood of the Narnian apple tree, thus linking the two stories and providing a satisfying conclusion.

Questions & Answers

What is the Wood between the Worlds?

The Wood between the Worlds is a tranquil, dream-like forest filled with many pools, each leading to a different universe. It functions as a nexus or hub, allowing travelers with the right magic (like Uncle Andrew's rings) to move between various worlds, including London, Charn, and Narnia. It is described as a quiet, peaceful place where time passes differently, and one can easily forget their original purpose, making it both beautiful and subtly dangerous.

What is the Deplorable Word?

The Deplorable Word is a powerful, destructive spell known only to the royal family of Charn. Jadis, the last Queen of Charn, used it to annihilate all life in her world, except for herself, rather than surrender her power during a civil war. It represents the ultimate act of selfish cruelty and the catastrophic consequences of absolute power wielded without mercy or restraint, highlighting the dangers of unchecked ambition.

Who is Jadis?

Jadis is the last Queen of Charn and later becomes the White Witch, the primary antagonist in Narnia. She is incredibly beautiful, immensely powerful, and utterly ruthless, having destroyed her own world with the Deplorable Word. She is brought to London by Digory and Polly, then accidentally to Narnia, where she attempts to seize control and eventually plunges it into a hundred-year winter, embodying pure evil.

How is Narnia created?

Narnia is created by Aslan, the Great Lion, through his song. As he sings, the land, stars, sun, and moon appear, followed by plants, trees, and eventually animals. Some of these animals are then chosen by Aslan to become Talking Beasts, endowed with reason and speech. The creation is a beautiful, harmonious, and awe-inspiring event, contrasting sharply with the destruction Jadis brought to Charn, emphasizing divine, creative power.

What is Uncle Andrew's role in the story?

Uncle Andrew is Digory's eccentric and selfish uncle, a dabbler in magic who believes himself a great sorcerer but is actually a coward and a manipulator. He creates the magic rings that transport Digory and Polly to other worlds, initiating their adventure. His actions are driven by curiosity and a desire for power, but he lacks moral courage and understanding, often causing trouble for the children and embodying human folly.

Why does Digory bring Jadis to Narnia?

Digory accidentally brings Jadis to Narnia. After he and Polly visit Charn and awaken Jadis, they try to return to London. However, Jadis follows them, and in a chaotic struggle involving Uncle Andrew and a cab driver, they all inadvertently touch the magic rings and are transported to the newly forming world of Narnia, just as Aslan is singing it into existence, an act of unintended consequence.

What is the significance of the apple tree?

The apple tree, grown from a silver apple brought by Digory from a special garden, is crucial for Narnia's protection. Aslan tasks Digory with planting it, and it grows into the Tree of Protection, which keeps the White Witch away from Narnia for many centuries. Later, a branch from this tree, brought back to London, grows into the wood from which the magical wardrobe is made, linking the two worlds.

How does the wardrobe from LWW originate?

Spoiler: The wardrobe originates from a magical apple tree. After Digory plants the silver apple in Narnia, Aslan allows him to take a different, ordinary apple from the Tree of Protection back to London for his sick mother. Digory plants the core of this apple in his garden, and it grows into a large tree. Years later, when the tree is blown down, its wood is used to build the famous

wardrobe that leads to Narnia.

What lesson does Digory learn?

Digory learns about responsibility, temptation, and the consequences of his actions. He initially makes selfish choices, like ringing the bell in Charn and bringing Jadis to Narnia. Through Aslan's guidance and his own struggle with temptation at the Tree of Protection, he learns to prioritize the greater good, understand true wisdom, and overcome his personal desires for a higher purpose, achieving moral growth.

What happens to Uncle Andrew at the end?

Spoiler: Uncle Andrew is brought to Narnia against his will and is terrified by the talking animals, whom he perceives as monstrous. Aslan puts him into a deep sleep, during which he is transformed into a better, though still somewhat timid, man. He returns to London, gives up magic, and becomes a slightly less unpleasant, though still self-centered, old man who is afraid of animals, showing a subtle but incomplete redemption.

Who are Polly and Digory?

Polly Plummer and Digory Kirke are the two main child protagonists of the story. Polly is a sensible and cautious girl, while Digory is more adventurous and often driven by curiosity, sometimes leading to trouble. They are neighbors in London who discover the magic rings and embark on the journey that leads them to Charn and ultimately to the creation of Narnia, serving as the first human visitors.

What is Aslan's role in the book?

Aslan, the Great Lion, is the divine creator and protector of Narnia. He sings Narnia into existence, gives life and speech to its creatures, and establishes its laws. He guides Digory, teaching him about responsibility, temptation, and redemption. Aslan represents divine wisdom, justice, and love, setting the moral framework for the entire Narnian world and embodying ultimate goodness.

What is the main theme of "The Magician's Nephew"?

The main theme is the origin of good and evil, and the nature of creation and corruption. It explores how a perfect world (Narnia) can be tainted by human folly and sin (Digory's actions, Jadis's presence). It also delves into themes of temptation, responsibility, redemption, and the contrast between true magic (Aslan's creative power) and selfish sorcery (Uncle Andrew's dabbling), providing a foundational myth for Narnia.

How does C.S. Lewis explain the presence of evil in Narnia?

C.S. Lewis explains the presence of evil in Narnia through the actions of humans. Digory, out of curiosity and a desire to escape Uncle Andrew, rings the bell in Charn, awakening Jadis. He then accidentally brings Jadis, a being of pure evil, into the newly created Narnia. This act of human

disobedience and carelessness introduces corruption and the potential for tyranny into a pristine world, mirroring biblical narratives of the Fall.

What is the relationship between "The Magician's Nephew" and "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe"?

"The Magician's Nephew" serves as a prequel to "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe." It explains the origins of Narnia, the White Witch (Jadis), the lamppost, and the magical wardrobe itself. Digory Kirke grows up to become Professor Kirke, who owns the house with the wardrobe, thus connecting the beginning of Narnia's history to its later adventures and providing context for the entire series.

Why does Aslan give Digory a special task?

Aslan gives Digory the task of planting the silver apple to atone for his mistake of bringing Jadis into Narnia and to help protect the new world. This task is a test of Digory's character, requiring him to overcome temptation and act selflessly. It's part of his moral education and a way for him to contribute positively to the world he inadvertently endangered, leading to his redemption.

What is the significance of the talking animals in Narnia?

The talking animals are a unique and central feature of Narnia, representing its vibrant, sentient nature and the special blessing bestowed by Aslan. They embody the spirit of Narnia's creation, capable of reason, speech, and moral choice. Their presence highlights the contrast between Narnia's living, magical world and the silent, ordinary animals of other universes, emphasizing Narnia's distinct spiritual quality.

What is the "first joke" and "first lie" in Narnia?

The "first joke" occurs when the newly created Talking Beasts mistake Uncle Andrew for a talking animal, specifically a tree-creature, and try to plant him. The "first lie" is when Uncle Andrew, in his fear and confusion, tries to deceive the animals, claiming he is a "tree" and that he is "not well." These events mark the introduction of misunderstanding and deceit into Narnia.

What happens to Digory's mother?

Spoiler: Digory's mother, Mabel Kirke, is very ill throughout the story, and Digory's greatest desire is to find a cure for her. Aslan allows Digory to take an ordinary apple from the Tree of Protection back to London. This apple, when eaten, miraculously cures his mother, restoring her health and bringing great joy to Digory and his family, providing a personal happy ending for Digory.

What does the title "The Magician's Nephew" refer to?

The title "The Magician's Nephew" refers to Digory Kirke, who is the nephew of Uncle Andrew, the self-proclaimed magician. Uncle Andrew's dabbling in magic, specifically his creation of the magic rings, sets in motion the entire adventure that leads Digory and Polly to Charn and then to

the creation of Narnia, making Digory the "magician's nephew" at the heart of the story.