

Narnia creators seek to turn beloved books into accessible movies

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NEW YORK (RNS)—C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* book series is so revered by Christian readers, adapting the books into film becomes a delicate tightrope. Changes risk alienating fans, but what works in the books doesn't always translate well to the big screen.

Walden Media and Disney recently released *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*, the sequel to the wildly successful 2005 movie, *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*. The filmmakers faced the challenge of turning a beloved book with a slow plot into a modern movie, but also one that retains the story's spiritual messages.

Ben Barnes (center) plays Prince Caspian in *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*. Actors (from left) Georgie Henley, William Moseley, Anna Popplewell and Skandar Keynes play the four Pevensie children, who return to Narnia after 1,300 years.

"The underlying messages are so important and so vital to the story," said Douglas Gresham, Lewis' stepson and co-producer of the new film. "Which are the return to faith, truth, justice, honesty, honor, glory, personal commitment, personal responsibility. Also, the message (that) no matter how far away we stray, there's only one way back."

The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe told the story of four Pevensie siblings who enter Narnia through an old wardrobe and defeat the tyrannical White Witch. They are aided by the great lion Aslan, but only after he submits himself to be killed in the place of turncoat Edmund Pevensie.

The book is widely regarded as a retelling of Lewis' Christian faith, with Aslan shining as a golden Christ figure who returns after death.

In *Prince Caspian*, the children return to Narnia. Although they are only a year older, 1,300 years have passed in their former kingdom. The evil interloper Miraz has stolen the throne from Prince Caspian and forced the true Narnians into hiding.

Aslan has not been seen in centuries. Each character in the movie faces the same crisis: They long to see Aslan, but he remains elusive.

William Moseley, who plays Peter Pevensie, sees the search for Aslan as a metaphor for faith.

"When you talk about seeing, I think it's more believing," he said. "You believe, and then you see. Aslan represents God. People say, 'If God's there, why can't I see him?' Well, because you're not believing."

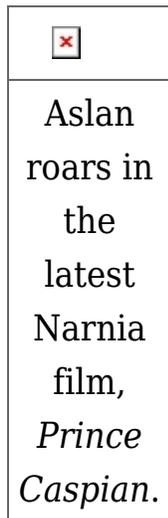
The movie format necessitated some changes to the book's storyline.

"Essentially, the book is a long walk followed by a short battle," said Andrew Adamson, the film's director and producer. He rearranged the timeline to put more action at the beginning and expanded the battle scene.

He also had to leave out some beloved scenes and characters. However, such sacrifices allow more room to fully explore such characters as Reepicheep the valiant mouse, and Trufflehunter the faithful badger, both developed using computer-generated imagery.

The film version also delves more deeply into the heart of Peter. His inability to see Aslan when his sister Lucy does—a key part of the book—is expanded into an inner struggle between his trust in Aslan and an ego-driven desire to prove himself.

Caspian, played by Ben Barnes, has a similar struggle—his desire for revenge against his evil uncle Miraz (Sergio Castellitto) nearly overwhelms his desire to serve Aslan purely in the cause of freedom.



Adamson also updated the movie for 21st century mores. To make it more inclusive, he added female dwarves, child-aged fawns and an “Afro-centaur” (Cornell John) as Glenstorm, the noble half-man, half-horse. In addition, the Pevensie sisters, Susan (Anna Popplewell) and Lucy (Georgie Henley), join the battle, which they avoid in the book.

For Adamson, it was an obvious choice to allow women an active role in the fight.

Referring to the gift of bow and arrow that Susan received in the first movie, Adamson joked, “If she’s just going to make sandwiches, then give her a plate and a knife.”

Adamson made his case for the changes to Gresham by arguing that Lewis’ female characters become stronger as the book series progresses

—something he attributes to Lewis' real-life romance with Gresham's mother, Joy Davidman.

This is the last of Narnia for Moseley and Popplewell, whose characters do not return in later books.

"I was sad about that," Popplewell said, "but I'm excited to do new things."

Still, they've taken home some lessons from their time in Narnia.

"Peter learned leadership is about serving other people and not serving yourself," Moseley said. "Peter had to learn to reinstate his trust in Aslan."