

# In Defense of Cynicism

*A follow up to yesterday's post, In Defense of LARPing.*

Cynicism didn't always have the connotation it does today. It was a school of philosophy concerned with accepting unchangeable elements of reality and rejecting attitudes and behaviors seen as superfluous, overly sentimental, or driven by passion instead of reason. It was similar to Stoicism.

In the best of times, cynicism may seem a bit silly, callous, or like a wet blanket. But in the worst of times, cynicism is the strongest foundation for hope and optimism.

In yesterday's post, I shared this story:

*In The Silver Chair, a book in C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia series, the characters are trapped underground by an evil queen. Her magic begins to work on them and she has nearly convinced them that the world above ground doesn't exist. The more they try to describe it to her, the more she mocks and convinces them it's a LARP. They are imagining some glorious world because they're too childish to accept the one they inhabit. At the last moment, the most humble creature among them steps forward and tells the queen he doesn't care if it IS all make-believe. If a few children can make-believe a world so much better than this, it must be a pretty cheap world and he'd rather keep believing in the delusion. At that, the spell was broken."*

What I did not mention is that the character who breaks the spell by choosing to LARP was a cynic. And it's no accident he was the only one able to break it.

Earlier in the story, that character was constantly assuming and accepting the worst. He'd say things like, "We'll probably fail or die along the way anyway, so we might as well go this way", or, "Doesn't much matter because I'm sure we'll get rained on no matter what."

On the surface, he was a downer. Especially when the weather was fine and no major challenges lay in their path. But when things got the darkest, he was the least shaken.

He had already made his peace with the worst possible outcomes. Every day, he began by considering the evil that might befall them, assuming it would, accepting it, and then

proceeding on.

Because of this, when the evil queen had them under her spell, he was the only one who couldn't be manipulated into giving up.

She tried to make them feel like fools for believing in an outside world they had no proof for. He already accepted the fact that he was a fool.

She tried to make them fear her wrath if they didn't comply. He already accepted that she'd probably kill him.

Evil had nothing on him, no threat that could stick, because he had already considered and accepted the worst. He was able to choose to believe in the idealistic hope of a wonderful world precisely because he accepted the possibility of an evil one. What could she do to him that he hadn't already mentally done to himself? Why not choose to rebel against her if his life was forfeit anyway?

It is honorable to hold on to hope – a form of what I called LARPing yesterday. But the strongest kind of hope is built on a foundation of fearless acceptance of what may befall you.

In dark times, watch the cynics provide hope.