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LOCs Box

John Plotz

Phil Harrell

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October 9--from John Plotz, Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Dick,

I don't want to be disrespectful of the learned Tolkien Society, but I think you are taking this too far. There is nothing more deadly to fantasy than cold analysis.

When I first read The Hobbit and the Lord of the Rings and the Adventures of Tom Bombadil at your insistence, I was enchanted by them all. Here, I thought, is a fascinating and beautiful dream-world. It seemed to me that Mr. Tolkien, like Homer, "knew the good of life, and evil." This was a rich world of imagination where I could lose myself for hours before I had to return to the more ugly and less heroic world of our own.

But this morning I received in the mail the second number of the Tolkien Journal which included articles about Tolkien's legal and financial position, a more or less scholarly article on philology by Mr. Mandel, and notes like this one: "Bob Foster is in the middle of the monumental task of producing another complete Tolkien index. This one will be cross-referenced, for a change. Bob has over 1200 items on index cards."

Surely this is missing the point. How far away is this dull scholarship and silly adoration (on a par, I think, with comic book specialists) from the beauty of Lothlorien or the grim splendor of the Dark Tower. It was all right for Mr. Tolkien to be concerned with details: it was up to him to produce a tightly-plotted novel in a carefully-wrought world; but for us to go through the strange passages of Middle-Earth with gun and camera (Look! There's an orc with an unanalyzed name!) is both unnecessary and harmful.

October 16--from Phil Harrell, Norfolk, Va.

Dear Dick,

On page 80 of the "Authorized Edition" of The Lord of the Rings by Bal. Books, we have Frodo saying, "I cannot read the fiery letters." Well, it seems to me the main reason for this outside of being in black speech is that it is UPSIDE DOWN!!!! Not only that but the cover is abominable (someone explain to me why Smaug is purply creeping up to Hobbiton???)

I could not let this Thing go without violent notice. I don't have the Ace, but a friend has and it has it all right! But the Authorized edition not only has a different map "A part of the Shire" (Ace has the original)

I compared the ACE edition to the BB and actually so far the only difference I see are the Maps (which BB seem to have had Prof. Tolkien rework and Remake adding and taking away a bit here and there). Otherwise reading the latest edition (Hardbound) and BB I see no change but that glaring of Putting the inscription in the ring in the book upside down (maybe Frodo was holding the Ring upside down) and that Abominable cover.

Now the Ace edition seems to capture the spirit of the

book (granted it made its share of errors also) and all the maps seem perfect so I may be forced to buy a copy of each set to get what I want. It may seem Blasphemy and all that, but so far I like the Ace Better and they cost 20¢ less. I'm as much a Tolkien fan as anyone else and would love to join T.S.A. but don't know a thing about it (other than what Ned Brooks told me) and didn't know it existed until Yesterday (the 16) when I was told about it.

Another Gripe I have against BB is that they knew that Professor Tolkien didn't care for the cover so out of deference to him do they change it on the next volume? NO!! They instead enlarge it and put more of it on The Fellowship of the Ring. Write if you will.

Phil:

1) In the latest Ballantine edition, the Ring inscription (page 80) is right side up.

2) The Ballantine Shire map is a revised version provided by Prof. Tolkien for the Ballantine LotR. The Ace map is out of date!

3) The references in the Ballantine appendices are cross-referenced to the Ballantine edition. Those in the Ace edition refer to the H/M edition. Must one buy the hardcover edition to use the paperback appendices?

4) The Hobbit cover has been changed to conform more closely to the author's tastes. Incidentally, the LotR mural was painted first. A section of it was appropriated for the first rush edition of The Hobbit.

Hope to hear more from you--Dick

Oh yes, and John:

Tolkien can be enjoyed on many levels. One is the pure esthetic appreciation that you suggest. However, Tolkien has been investigating Middle-earth for fifty years, and the bit of fantasy presented in The Hobbit and LotR is only one facet of his work. Most of what has been published on the rest of his work is contained in the appendices and in a few scattered fanzines. Anyone who reads the Middle-earth books will feel the "beauty of Lothlorien" and the "grim splendor of the Dark Tower." It remains for publications like the Tolkien Journal to present in a more readable form the material in the appendices and similar material throughout the books. Surely the fantasy is already readable enough.