

Spring 4-15-1967

Editorial

Dick Plotz

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Recommended Citation

Plotz, Dick (1967) "Editorial," *Tolkien Journal*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 3.
Available at: https://dc.swosu.edu/tolkien_journal/vol3/iss2/3

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Editorial

EDITORIAL
by Dick Plotz

This will be my last issue of the Tolkien Journal. I've been talking with Ed Meškys about the transfer of the TSA, and he seems willing and able to continue the Journal, and possibly the button, book, and poster services, with much more consistency than I have been able to provide. The necessity for change is probably evident to many of you whose button orders, sent in months ago, have not yet been processed. There are many reasons for both the delay and the imminent transfer.

Central to the whole problem is the basic setup of the TSA as I conceived it over two years ago. It was a small, one-man organization, designed for no more than a couple of hundred members. Membership was free, the Journal sustained by contributions. I could recognize every member's name for the first few months. Then came the magazine articles and the paperbacks. Circulation jumped from 100 for the first issue to 250 for the second. Ballantine Books unofficially printed the third issue (400 copies) and the fourth (800) when they could not be covered by voluntary contributions. At no time, in fact, did Ballantine imply any obligation or exert any editorial influence. The decision to support and push the Ballantine paperbacks until Ace paid royalties was mine, made before I had any contact with Ballantine.

But a year ago I was forced to charge membership and subscription fees, which turned out to be less if I used my own printer. Dues were \$1.50 at first, and went up to \$2.00 early this year, to keep enrolment down rather than to finance extra costs. But as more people read the Books, more joined. By the end of 1966, there were one thousand dues-paying members; there are another five hundred or so now. The burden is simply too heavy for me to handle. I've enlisted the help of my family, friends, enemies, anyone, but those of who wrote for buttons for someone's birthday in May will find that hard to believe. Imagine this, then: so far this year, I have received nearly ten thousand letters. Generally, mail has come in at the rate of fifty to sixty letters a day. I begin to agree with those who complain that the TSA has become a Sauronic monster.

Unlike some of my harshest critics, though, I do think there is a place for an inclusive organization for Tolkien people. Tolkien's popularity is a bare fact. The Tolkien Society of America had little, if anything, to do with creating that fact. There is no returning to the days when one could write messages on subway walls in Elvish and expect that they would remain confidential. But it is still possible to get immense enjoyment from just reading The Lord of the Rings and talking with a few friends about the hidden ways of Lothlórien. This is the ideal way to know Tolkien, the way of the smial and less. The great need for a large blanket organization, not a smial, is this: there must be one publication that anyone can get, which provides general news and articles. What would it be like having to buy Tolkien Journals from New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Atlanta to get the full picture? And a small, exclusive, yet geographically widespread organization would quickly become narrow and cultish, like the Baker Street Irregulars.

So we have a large organization, publishing four (?) times a year, selling buttons, books, and posters; a one-room plant, appropriated from a house that is lived in; and a Thain who can't be active and in school at the same time. Solution: disband or transfer.

I thought it would be disband, pay you all off, and throw the field open to the dogs, until a week ago when Ed Meškys called. Seems that Belknap College, where he teaches physics, has a new computer which, among other things, prints mailing lists from IBM cards onto mailing la

bels. I would say maintaining the mailing list in proper order was the most harrowing task I had as Thain, and the one I was most reluctant to entrust to lesser hands, aside from editing the Journal. If a machine could do that for Ed, then he, as Thain or whatever, would have that much more time to answer your questions personally or to compile a better Tolkien Journal. Ed hopes to be able to take advantage of other opportunities at Belknap which would enable him to take over most of the functions of the TSA with much less effort. The button-book-poster business may have to go to someone else, but the whole operation will probably be preserved. Meanwhile, I have people working day and night to get your orders to you. That birthday may be long past, but Tolkien is timeless.

All these arrangements must be discussed at the meeting, but it seems fairly certain that the next Thain of the TSA will be Edmund R. Meškys (pronounced Meshkeess, to set you on the right foot at the start). You will be pleased with the new service, which cannot be half so atrocious as it is now, even if the computer breaks down. In anticipation of leaving, I'd like to say that I've enjoyed the Tolkien Society of America, that I look forward to helping out in the future in any small capacity that Ed has for me, and I hope you continue to support it as you have in the past. Eru knows it should tax your patience less. Namáriel

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Solution to Scott Smith's Middle-earth crossword, II:4, amended in III:1.

