

m^othPRINT

Quarterly Bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society with Book Reviews, Short Articles, Event Information, and More!

VOL. 58 NO. 2

SUMMER 2020

WHOLE NO. 393



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By Neill McKee. © 2020. [REDACTED]

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Mythprint is the quarterly bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society, a nonprofit educational organization devoted to the study, discussion, and enjoyment of myth and fantasy literature, especially the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams. To promote these interests, the Society publishes three magazines, maintains a World Wide Web site, and sponsors the annual Mythopoeic Conference and awards for fiction and scholarship, as well as local discussion groups.

MEMBERSHIP AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

Mythopoeic Society membership: \$15/year includes an electronic subscription and \$25/year includes a paper subscription to *Mythprint*; either entitles you to members' rates on publications and other benefits.

POSTAGE AND NON-MEMBER SUBSCRIPTION RATES

First Class U.S. \$25/year

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Complete & updated price lists can always be found on our website.

The easiest way to join the Mythopoeic Society and subscribe to our publications or join our annual conference is to visit our website. We take personal checks as well as PayPal, which is the easiest way for overseas members. Back issues of *Mythprint* are available for purchase at our website.

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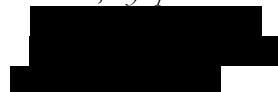
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Reviews of mythopoeic media, discussion group reports, news items, letters, art work, notes or short articles, and other submissions for *Mythprint* are always welcome. In return for printed pieces, contributors who are not already subscribers will receive an electronic copy of the issue in which the item appears. Contributors who are already subscribers will not receive an additional copy. Please contact the editor for details on format, or send materials to:

Megan Abrahamson

Editor, *Mythprint*



The Mythopoeic Society also publishes two other magazines: *Mythlore* (subscription \$25/year for U.S. Society members) and *The Mythic Circle*, an annual magazine publishing fiction, poems, etc. (\$8/issue for U.S. addresses). Subscriptions and back issues of Society publications may be purchased directly through our web site (using PayPal or Discover card), or you may contact:

Mythopoeic Society Orders Department



Visit The Mythopoeic Society online at [REDACTED]

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**MYTHCON 51:
THE MYTHIC, THE FANTASTIC,
AND THE ALIEN**

Albuquerque, NCO

July 31 – August 3rd, 2020

POSTPONED

July 30th – August 2nd, 2021

Due to quarantines and health concerns, the Council of Stewards has decided to postpone **Mythcon 51** until summer of 2021; the date will be **July 30-August 2, 2021**. Our venue and Guests of Honor have all agreed to this change and the conference theme will remain the same. Your membership will automatically roll over to next year but if you cannot attend next year, please contact [REDACTED] and request a refund of your Mythcon 51 membership. For those who paid the non-member prices, your membership in the Mythopoeic Society associated with joining the conference will be extended by a year. Thank you for understanding!

This year's theme provides multiple opportunities to explore the Other in fantasy and mythopoeic literature. Tolkien spoke in "On Fairy-stories" of "the desire to visit, free as a fish, the deep sea; or the longing for the noiseless, gracious, economical flight of a bird." We invite discussion about the types of fantasy that are more likely to put us into contact with the alien, such as time portal fantasy and space travel fantasy.

In addition to Inklings, some writers who deal particularly well with the truly alien who might be explored include Lovecraft, Gaiman, Le Guin, Tepper, and others. Other topics that might be fruitfully explored are: depictions of the alien Other in film (*Contact*, *Arrival*, etc.); developing constructed languages that are truly different from those of Earth-based humans; fantastical Others in indigenous myths (such as Coyote and Spider Woman from Native American mythology); and American folklore about the alien (flying saucers, alien abduction, Area 51, Roswell, NM).

Please join us at the Ramada Plaza Hotel by Wyndham in Albuquerque, New Mexico, for

Mythcon 51. Albuquerque is a wonderful destination city where Mythcon has been held only once before in 2011 (Mythcon 42) and is well worth the return.

More information can always be found at [REDACTED].

Call for Papers

Papers on our conference theme and the works and interests of our guests of honor are especially welcome, although all subjects will be considered.

PAPERS and PANELS PROPOSALS: Email papers abstracts of 200-500 words by April 15, 2021:

Cami Agan (Papers Coordinator),
[REDACTED]

Email panels abstracts of 50-150 words by April 15, 2021:

Leslie Donovan (Panels Coordinator),
[REDACTED]

Include AV requests and time slot needed. We will make every effort to accommodate A/V requests, but such equipment is limited and cannot be guaranteed. Time slots: Individual long papers are one hour, about 45 minutes for the paper and 15 minutes for discussion; Individual short papers or 1/2 hour, about 20 minutes for the paper and 10 minutes for discussion; Panels are 90 minutes, about 60 minutes for the panel and 30 minutes for discussion.

All presenters must register for the full conference; see the Mythcon 51 Registration page for information and rates.

Eligible presenters should see details on our Alexei Kondratiev student paper award at [REDACTED].



Rivera Sun: Author Guest of Honor

Rivera Sun is a change-maker, a cultural creative, a protest novelist, and an advocate for nonviolence and social justice. She is the author of *The Dandelion Insurrection*, *The Roots of Resistance*, and other novels. Her young adult fantasy series, the Ari Ara Series, has been widely acclaimed by teachers, parents, and peace activists for its blending of fantasy and adventure with social justice issues. Going beyond dragon-slayers and sword-swingers, heroes and sheroes in Ari Ara's world stop wars and wage peace. They use active nonviolence to make powerful change. In all her works, Rivera Sun advocates that if we want to build a culture of peace, we have to tell new stories that still appreciate, but go beyond the old myths, epics, and legends that rehash outdated war and violence narratives. *The Way Between*, the first book in the Ari Ara Series, has been read by numerous groups of all ages, while the second book in the series, *The Lost Heir*, has been nominated for the 2020 Dayton Peace Literature Prize.

Rivera Sun's essays have been published in hundreds of journals nationwide. She is a frequent speaker and presenter at schools, colleges and universities, where *The Dandelion Insurrection* has been taught in literature and political science courses. Rivera Sun is also the editor of *Nonviolence News*, an activist, and a trainer in making change with nonviolence. Her essays and writings are syndicated

MYTHCON 51 GUESTS OF HONOR

by Peace Voice and have appeared in journals nationwide. She lives in an Earthship house in New Mexico.

David Bratman: Scholar Guest of Honor

David Bratman has been reading Tolkien for over fifty years, and has been writing Tolkien scholarship for nearly as long. His earliest contribution to the field was the first-ever published Tale of Years for the First Age, right after *The Silmarillion* was published. Since then he's published articles with titles like "Top Ten Rejected Plot Twists from *The Lord of the Rings*," "Hobbit Names Aren't from Kentucky," and "Liquid Tolkien" (on Tolkien and music). He's been co-editor of *Tolkien Studies: An Annual Scholarly Review* since 2013, and has written or edited its annual "Year's Work in Tolkien Studies" since 2004. David edited *The Masques of Amen House* by Charles Williams and contributed the bio-bibliographical appendix on the Inklings to Diana Pavlac Glyer's *The Company They Keep*. He has also written on C.S. Lewis, Ursula Le Guin, Mervyn Peake, Neil Gaiman, and others. For the Mythopoeic Society he was editor of the monthly bulletin *Mythprint* for fifteen years, and has worked on many Mythopoeic Conferences, including serving twice as chair. He is a retired academic librarian and an active classical music reviewer who lives with his wife, Berni (a soprano and violinist), and two cats in a house they call Minnipin Cottage.



MYTHOPOEIC SOCIETY RECORDING SECRETARY POSITION OPENING

Greetings, Mythopoeic Society Members, I have enjoyed the past 20+ years of board service to the Mythopoeic Society as its Recording Secretary. It has been a privilege to contribute even in a small way to their efforts. I am gratified to have worked with so many creative and talented Stewards whom I also regard as friends.

Fondly,
Gerry Holmes

The Duties of the Recording Secretary are as follows:

1. MINUTES: Take and write up the minutes from the quarterly Steward Meetings per year held via conference call. After the Call to Order, the Recording Secretary takes attendance and reports to the President the names of the attending Stewards. The previous meeting minutes are then voted on for acceptance with or without corrections. If corrections, additions, etc., need to be made, the Recording Secretary will make any changes, corrections, etc., and then post the amended minutes to the Steward's List. The February meeting's focus is the annual budget for the Society. For a typical copy of the minutes, see the template at the end of this document.

2. ANNUAL REPORT: Every year, each Steward writes a report for the Society's Annual Report (AR). As a non-profit organization, the Society is mandated by California law to write and submit an AR. The Recording Secretary creates a short summary of the year's meeting minutes.

3. ELECTION RECORDING: Every three years, the Society holds an election for all the Steward offices. The Membership Steward creates both an electronic and paper ballot which is sent to all members. Any member can choose to run for any Steward office. The election period is generally a month long (1 November - 1 December). The Recording Secretary reads and records all submitted ballots. At the end of the election period, the election results are tabulated by the Recording Secretary and reported to the Stewards via the Steward's List. The results are published in *Mythopoeic*, the Society newsletter.

Members who are interested in applying should contact the 2020 Chair of the Council of Stewards, David Emerson, at [REDACTED]

MY STATEMENT ON "TOLKIEN 2019"

By Elyanna Choi

Preface. My statement was originally published on 21/06/2020 on my Tumblr blog, and I have edited some parts of the original text for publication in print. I would like to extend my gratitude to Megan for allowing me this opportunity to share my piece in *Mythopoeic*.

I hope that members of Tolkien fandom and scholarship and other allied spaces and disciplines will continue to question the barriers and systemic flaws in their institutions in the hopes of creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment for the sharing of new ideas and scholarship from diverse perspectives.

My Statement on Tolkien 2019. It has been incredibly difficult for me to speak on my experiences regarding my experiences of hostility and othering in spaces that I loved and still hold dear to my heart, and for that reason I have been silent. That is until now.

I have decided that now is the right time for me to come forward with my experience and statement regarding my negative experience as a person of colour engaging in Tolkien spaces.

I want people involved in the wider Tolkien community to reflect on their roles in the specific spaces they inhabit, and how you can foster a better environment for marginalised groups to interact and engage with those spaces in a safe and inclusive manner.

Take your time to listen and put effort into listening to fans of colour when they are speaking about their lived experiences and their grievances, especially when they are speaking about a topic as personal as racism. Being critical of a work you love and the media surrounding it is not an easy thing, but we need to recognise that these criticisms are valid and deserve to be taken seriously when they affect a collective of people across different backgrounds.

I want to preface this by stating that I am speaking only for myself and my own lived experience as a vocal young non-black POC in a predominantly white space. I acknowledge that my experience is by no means universal or indicative of all POC in Tolkien fandom spaces.

I also understand that real life interactions differ widely from interactions on online fandom spaces, but there are disturbing similarities across both online and real life spaces with specific regard to the environment and treatment of vocal POC in both.

The tragedy is that many people do not realise their impact not only on the individuals involved, but on

the wider attitude towards POC voices in fandom when the topic of racism is discussed. We need to build safe environments where critical discussions of diversity and race from the people most affected by them are taken to heart, not invalidated or spoken over as targets of microaggressions.

Tolkien 2019 was an in person conference organised by the Tolkien Society (which I was a member of at the time). The official website for Tolkien 2019 has been taken down, but various posts on the Tolkien Society website blog have been published in the lead up and following the event to summarise and recount the event.

I was approached by the Education Secretary of the Society at the time about my possible involvement in a panel discussing the history and future of the Tolkien Society which I elaborate on further in my statement. It was the first time I had felt that I had a platform where I could freely express my voice as a diverse reader and consumer of Tolkien media who held diversity in Tolkien as a core value in the wider Tolkien brand.

I felt that as the only non-white member on the panel I had an obligation to speak out on the topic of diversity when it was raised. I tried to speak briefly about some of the points and discourses I had heard on portrayals of diversity in Tolkien media with as much nuance as I could manage at the time. In response to some points I had made I was met with vocal disapproval by some audience members and visible signs of disapproval and hostile body language from others.

This was made even more jarring later during the course of the event when two white creators hinted at vague notions of diversity were met with a far greater degree of approval. The former instance was during the context of a panel regarding the upcoming *LOTR* on Prime series, and the latter was during a talk presented by the chair of the Tolkien Society.

I felt intimidated and reluctant to involve myself any further in the Tolkien fandom, especially in real life spaces as my experience at Tolkien 2019 had only solidified and reaffirmed my fears and unease I had engaging in a predominantly white fandom with few

visible POC members and creators who tackle topics of diversity and racism in both the community and source texts.

Following this event I was approached by an affiliate of one of the attendees who very kindly took the time to listen to me and suggested that I should write a statement in response to my experience... Since then some of my thoughts and opinions on certain aspects of Tolkien fandom and meta have shifted or evolved, which I will hopefully expand on in the future, but I wanted to share my initial unchanged statement reflecting my immediate reaction to my experience.

I want to be seen as a Tolkien creative and critical thinker above anything else, but I cannot move forward with my work without speaking about my lived experience in a space which has been consistently hostile to me and so many others across different Tolkien spaces for so many years, starting with my account of this one experience.

The statement I wrote on 25/09/2019 is as follows. From the 9th to 11th of August of this year I attended a conference held by the Tolkien society aptly named “Tolkien 2019” that advertised itself as the “largest celebration of Tolkien ever held by the Society” in which I both spoke as a panelist and independent speaker. The event itself was a mixture of both formal and informal panels, papers presented by selected members of the society, and evening social events.

“...it was never about changing Tolkien's works, but reinterpreting his 20th century text littered with colonial artefacts and reimagining the foundations of his work through a 21st century lens in an attempt to decolonise the interpretation of his works in popular culture.”

My invitation to speak on the “History of the Tolkien Society” panel was presented as a deliberate choice made by the panel organiser as a gateway for discussion about diversity and representation in Tolkien. On the official programme, the panel was described as a discussion concerning “what the Tolkien Society and Tolkien fandom in general may become as it

encounters digital spaces, issues of representation and diversity, academic interest and a myriad other factors that make up our lived experience today”.

Although there was much excitement and anticipation on my behalf in the weeks and days leading up to the event, it soon turned to dread when the tone and climate of the discussion dawned on me when I took my seat alongside five other panelists ranging from

seasoned Tolkien scholars, long-time members of the Society, and a member with a leadership position within the Society. On that four person panel, I was the only one racialised as non-white. In fact, I was one of only three people in a room of approximately fifty to sixty people racialised as non-white.

It wasn't long before the true motive of placing me—a young, new member of the Society, who felt already out of place and out of my depth even being offered the opportunity to participate in the first place—on a panel of what I perceived to be more seasoned members of the society.

When the topic of diversity and representation in the Tolkien fandom was raised by the moderator, I saw it as an opportunity for me to share my own experiences as a young fan who predominantly consumed Tolkien content online, as well as some observations I had made regarding the current pop-cultural perception of Tolkien as being heavily influenced, if not wholly centered around the Peter Jackson trilogies and being deeply ingrained with the issues that seep from those interpretations into our overall perception of the Tolkien brand.

One of the talking points that seemed to have caused the biggest uproar and dissent was one in which I referred to Tolkien's description of Sam's hands as brown in two instances—the first in *The Two Towers*, and the second instance in *Return of the King*, and how this has been translated into film as both literal and symbolic interpretations. The former in the Ralph Bakshi's *The Lord of the Rings* released in 1978 in which I noted that the decision to portray Sam as more ethnically ambiguous compared to the other Hobbits was a deliberate choice, whereas the latter was depicted in the recent Peter Jackson trilogy released in the early 2000's took the description symbolically and cast the white American actor Sean Astin for the role.

The backlash I received for this was, I believe, absolutely disproportionate to the views I expressed. I saw members frown and grunt in disapproval, as well as some visibly shake their heads at me. In spite of me parroting how I saw both interpretations as equally valid as a defence mechanism in the face of such an aggressive response to what to me seemed like an innocuous observation made by a young person of colour who did not see many portrayals of people of colour in Tolkien.

Comments such as “I don't care who they cast as Sam whether he's black, brown, yellow, blue or green!” and “Tolkien's message is universal I don't see how race factors into this!” were shouted in between points I was making, and countless others were made

as an effort to dismiss the effort I put in to hopefully start an open dialogue about the lack of diversity in adaptations of Tolkien and how it has coloured our perception of the overall brand, and perhaps fantasy as a whole.

Some other talking points I decided to mention included Peter Jackson's *Easterlings* (coded as being North African or Middle Eastern in the film) as being appallingly Orientalist and damaging in a post-9/11 world, as well as referring to Tolkien's vague descriptions of certain characters and people groups that can be interpreted as ethnic coding or perhaps hint at a more diverse cast than the popular brand of Tolkien may have us believe. I iterated that it is the responsibility of consumers of Tolkien and Tolkien related media to push for different interpretations of the text in order to break the perception that Tolkien's works are entirely Anglo and Eurocentric with no place for people of colour in the vast world he had created, in my opinion as a love letter to his own.

A month later it is still difficult for me to fully wrap my head around what I had experienced during the conference, much less articulating it in a statement, but if there is a note I would like to conclude on it would be this: it was never about changing Tolkien's works, but reinterpreting his 20th century text littered with colonial artefacts and reimagining the foundations of his work through a 21st century lens in an attempt to decolonise the interpretation of his works in popular culture.

To change the way we read, write and depict the Tolkien brand is to fundamentally change the landscape of the entire genre of fantasy, which has and still derives so heavily from Tolkien's works and the global Tolkien brand.

REVIEWS

Tolkien: Voyage en Terre du Milieu:
Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Exhibit
Reviewed by Cami Agan.

I had the great fortune to attend the *Tolkien: Voyage en Terre du Milieu* exhibit at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France [BnF] in January of 2020. Because I purchased a membership to the BnF, I was able to return four times to the exhibit for 15 Euro. While I did not make the Bodleian exhibit, I did see the Morgan Li-

brary exhibit in March of 2019, and having read Jason Fisher’s review of the Morgan (*Mythprint* #388) and Robin Reid’s review of the Bodleian (*Mythprint* #386), I can safely say the BnF exhibit corresponded more fully to the Oxford exhibit in scope, size, and number of Tolkien-related artefacts. Perhaps the additional insight the BnF brought to the Tolkien holdings was its ability to *contextualize* the Tolkien materials with hundreds of artefacts held in their collection: medieval, late 19th century, and modernist, to name but a few.

In contrast to the Morgan exhibit, the BnF also boasted ample *space*, with room after room organized to move viewers through Tolkien’s creations, as well as through examples of historical, scholarly, literary pieces. I would estimate the BnF exhibit was 3–4 times larger than the Morgan. As a result, even on a crowded weekend visit, there was far more room to move through the space and to spend time with various pieces than the Morgan could afford. The BnF also made expert use of projection to provide context for Tolkien’s world to the less informed visitor. For instance, the entry wall featured a projection of The History of Arda from the arrival of the Ainur to the Fourth Age, as well as a map of Third Age Middle-earth with the journeys of the Nine Walkers highlighted from the Shire eastward.

Focused on the Peoples of Middle-earth, the BnF rooms then moved through Hobbit lands, to Elvish spaces, followed by Dwarf dwellings, the Forests of Treebeard, the lands of Rohan and Gondor (with Númenor also represented), and on to the enemy lands of Isengard and Mordor; visitors spiraled toward a center point, a dark room with a voice chanting the “Three Rings for the Elven Kings” poem in French, English, and the Black speech of Mordor. This flow allowed visitors to mimic the Quest of the Ring, as we moved West to East and finally confronted the dark spaces of Mordor. Then, through a long hall illuminated by 40-foot windows that featured a scrim depicting Eärendil’s ship, and Tolkien’s voice singing the hymn of Galadriel, we passed pass beyond Middle-earth to Valinor. This transition put us in Frodo’s shoes as he sailed West from the Grey Havens.

As it concluded, the exhibit featured biographical and historical contexts of Tolkien’s family, his friendships [TCBS] during WWI, his work in Leeds and Oxford, featuring photography and artefacts – such as Tolkien’s writing desk and textbooks such as the *Kalevala*, an OE grammar, the *Elder Edda*, *Sir Gawain*, and the *Ancrene Rime* – that offered a window into the professor’s life beyond his legendarium. Again, in contrast to the Morgan, these halls were large enough to

hold substantial crowds and most importantly, far more objects, artefacts, and photographs, so much so that the historical-biographical section was equally as large as the Arda rooms had been.

While listing the hundreds of objects from the BnF holdings that provided vital context would run to many pages, there were highlight objects for each room. For the Shire, there were walking maps of Warwickshire, a Plan-Map of an English village, tavern paintings, a pub drinking song!, an 18th century English travel guide, and a bronze age short sword to suggest Sting; for the Elven regions [my personal favorite] there was Art Nouveau jewelry in gorgeous tree-motifs by Georges Fouquet, a Burne-Jones Pre-Raphaelite painting, an 18th century Chinese bow and arrow, and books of fairy tales by Bauer and Andersen. Other objects included medieval books of hours, Arthurian manuscripts, illustrations of Dante’s *Inferno*, chain mail, a broken sword, a cross-bow, numerous Fairy Tale books/illustrations, armor—even a winged helmet and horse visor!—a 16th century runic calendar from Finland, engravings by Dürer, an ivory chess set with 8-inch pieces [elephants!], images of cavalry charges, a Danish chronology in runes, and on and on.

Of course, the unique new artefacts featured at the BnF exhibit were the Aubusson tapestries: Bilbo comes to the Huts of the Raft-elves, Rivendell, the Bay of Eldamar, Halls of Manwë Taniquetil, and Mithrim. These were featured throughout the exhibit in context, dazzling in size, color, and execution. In addition, the exhibit periodically posed insightful questions: the Shire, image of idealized England? Hobbits: heroes or anti-heroes? At the end of the Quest – victory? A Story without Women? Gollum – between Good and Evil? with supporting discussion, video, audio and text to further these questions.

But there was one final room, a room made all the more poignant because my first visit to the exhibit came the day after Christopher Tolkien’s passing – a space celebrating the contributions of Christopher Tolkien over the final 40 years of his life. This final space paid homage to the vast history only known to us because Christopher served so brilliantly as executor to his father, and shepherded the legendarium into the world with detailed curation. These years gave us *The Silmarillion*, *The History of Middle-earth*, and the final Three Great Tales of Middle-earth. As such, we [reluctantly] left the exhibit by passing the “vast back-cloths” Christopher opens: the map of Beleriand, the manuscripts for *Cottage of Lost Play* and the *Lay of Leithian*, all framed by the massive tapestry of Mithrim.

Seeing the exhibit with the depth of context the BnF was able to provide, alongside viewers who for the most part were French, I came to an even deeper appreciation of Tolkien's capacities of creation; clearly, as the immense popularity of the exhibit proves, Arda speaks to people in many languages and through many mediums.

Neill McKee. *Finding Myself in Borneo: sojourns in Sabah*. NBFS Creations, 2019. 244 pp. \$19.95.
Reviewed by Gary Hunnewell (aka Hildifons Took).

I find that I cannot read an autobiography unless I can relate to it in some manner. Neill McKee, co-Founder of the North Borneo Frodo Society, and I have some common themes in our lives, but **he** was the adventurous one. His autobiography draws you into the narrative, a story of a young man 'trying to find himself' during the late 1960s. He knew he did not want to stay in his small town and follow in his father's business. Then after graduating with a psychology degree, and disenchanted with intern work on a mental hospital, McKee realized *that* was no career for him. At that point, this introverted Canadian decided to join the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO), which is similar to Britain's Voluntary Service Overseas and America's Peace Corps.

The two questions that I would have asked myself: (1) *What will I eat?* and (2) *What diseases await me?* never seem to enter his thoughts. Soon after landing in Hong Kong with other CUSO members, he walks out of his hotel and, after haggling with a rickshaw man, explores various parts of the city. Again, he does this, in Singapore, seemingly without a care in the world. When he reaches Borneo, his assignment is consid-

ered the backwaters of Sabah, the town of Kota Belud. The village is truly a melting pot of cultures, languages, and politics. His teaching position was to follow a broad, rigorous British model of education, which he admitted he was learning as he went along, in a school with a paucity of materials.

Many things come together for the creation of the

North Borneo Frodo Society (NBFS): a first-and-only experience with LSD, a viewing of *Camelot*, his affable housemate Peter Regan, and the particular topology of Borneo. He and Regan were traveling on a motorbike from the capital back to Kota Belud.

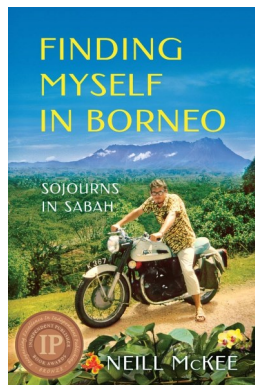
Going around a bend, we saw a Kadazan farmer in front of us on the roadside. Dwarfed by his tapered rattan basket full of tapioca roots, he trudged along like a beast of burden. I noticed his shoeless, enormous feet, which appeared to have been flattened by such labor. As we passed, he smiled and waved at us, apparently accustomed to strange people like us on this busy road.

Peter, seated behind me, suddenly spoke into my ear, "He's a Hobbit!" We both broke out in laughter again. We had been reading the J. R. R. Tolkien trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*. As the designated driver, it was hard enough to keep my mind on these mountain roads without such additional layers of imagination to distract me. But the seed of an idea had been planted and it would germinate for some weeks. This was even better than *Camelot*.

Soon after, the NBFS was created, with membership around the world, including Professor Tolkien. Enlisting the help of two American teachers, Peter Regan and Caitie O'Shea, they produced newsletters and maps showing how North Borneo *must* have inspired Tolkien's Middle-earth. Wasn't it obvious that with its dragon legend Mt. Kinabalu was the Lonely Mountain and the Shire was somewhere beneath the South China Sea? They certainly had a great time with it.

However, the book is not about just schoolwork and the NBFS. It is obvious that he fell in love with the country, its people, its ghost stories, and its landscapes. Always the casual adventurer, he scales Mt. Kinabalu (elevation over 13,000 ft.), travels by steamer to Jakarta (where his "bed" in a youth hostel is just a door sitting on two sawhorses), hitchhikes in Japan... you get the idea... the experiences we read about, but would be unlikely to do ourselves. Throughout the book you will be treated to Malay words, which punctuate the stories. Perhaps, this would have interested Professor Tolkien at the time, had McKee and Regan ever made it to England to talk with him.

A young single man on his own for the first time, his relationships with women are handled candidly and gently; there is no sense of conquest or bravado. Like many books of this kind, McKee reflects on what motivated people's actions. His introspection on the life



and death of his Headmaster occupies a chapter in the book as well as the disastrous results with his replacement. During this time, his love of filmmaking came to fruition, a vocation that would find him a wife and take them throughout the world during his career.

The book follows the rest of this life in far less detail, except for his return trips to Kota Belud. He finds his students have fared very well, his two-year teaching stint providing them a path to better jobs. However, the landscape of the country had suffered significantly, making Saruman's Isengard seem like a nature preserve.

And, the North Borneo **Frodo Society Lives!** If you are interested in joining the Society or reading the book, Neill McKee's website is:

[REDACTED]

I rarely read books twice, but this one I did. If you like truthful, reflective stories of far away places with a good dose of Tolkien fandom thrown in, I urge you to buy the book!

This review also appears in Beyond Bree May 2020.

Celeste Ng. *Little Fires Everywhere*. Penguin Books, 2018. 347 pp. \$12.75. A review, of a sort, by Joe R. Christopher.

As of 4 July 2020, Ng's novel had been on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list for seventy-three weeks. My interest in it for *Mythprint* is based on one paragraph:

[Mia Warren] thought suddenly of those moments at the restaurant, after the dinner rush had ended and things were quiet, when Bebe sometimes rested her elbows on the counter and drifted away. Mia understood exactly where she drifted to. To a parent your child wasn't just a person: your child was a *place*, a kind of Narnia, a vast eternal place where the present you were living and the past you remembered and the future you longed for all existed at once. (121-122)

I do not think in Lewis's Narnia, that a future is longed for in this sense. The Narnian books are not involved in parental desires for their children's lives; as children's books, they are involved in the children as protagonists in a present-time action. In short, Ng is creating her symbolic Narnia for her own perspective.

The paragraph continues:

You could see it every time you looked at her: layered in her face was the baby she'd been and

the child she'd become and the adult she would grow up to be, and you saw them all simultaneously, like a 3-D image. It made your head spin. It was a place you could take refuge, if you knew how to get in. And each time you left it, each time your child passed out of your sight, you feared you might never be able to return to that place again. (122)

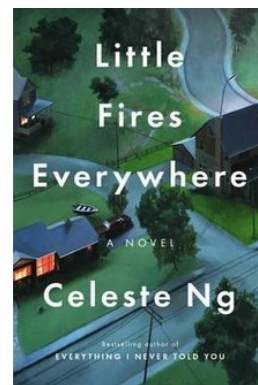
Ng's use of the feminine gender for the child is interesting ("every time you looked at her"), but that is probably due to Bebe's baby in the novel being female—not a feminist use of the female as a universal pronoun.

Ng's "vast eternal place" is a place of psychological comfort, not a semi-allegorical place of adventure. Still, the last two sentences of this Narnian paragraph may well be inspired by the conclusion of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The four children—Peter, Edmund, Susan, and Lucy—are worried that they may not be able to return to Narnia. The Professor comments, in the penultimate paragraph of the novel, "Eh? What's that? Yes, of course you'll get back to Narnia again someday. Once a King in Narnia always a King in Narnia." But Ng's place of maternal comfort can be lost. (Actually, Bebe at this point in the novel does not know where her baby daughter is, and Mia Warren is probably reading into Bebe's day dream her own [Mia's] feelings about her own daughter.)

The details of Ng's novel do not—in any extended way—reflect Narnia; nevertheless, the one paragraph appears to claim a bit of similitude. Even in Shaker Heights, Ohio.

Katy Rose Pool. *There Will Come a Darkness* Henry Holt and Co., 2019. 496 pp. Paperback \$11.99. Reviewed by Amy S. Moore

There Will Come a Darkness is a YA fantasy novel by debut author Katy Rose Pool. It follows five main characters: Hassan, an exiled prince; Anton, a gambler on the run from his past; Ephyra, a ruthless killer with a cause; Jude, the newly-appointed leader of an ancient



order of knights; and Beru, a girl searching for an answer for her terrible illness. Their lives intersect in the port city of Pallas Athos at the tipping point of the world's final prophecy, as the end of the world is set in motion and a wave of fanaticism for a new religion begins to turn neighbor against neighbor.

A port city is the perfect place for five characters with vastly different lives, beliefs, and goals to meet, and it provides a compelling backdrop for the narrative as well, as a vibrant mix of cultures and characters comes together. The strength of the novel's character work and voice comes through in this aspect as well, as different main characters have different levels of familiarity with the city and help each other—or not. Pool really does an excellent job of differentiating between each characters' point of view, admirably so when juggling five perspectives across geographic and philosophical distance. Her prose is excellent as well, quick and readable without sacrificing detail, and with a particular strength in dialogue that's truly admirable.

Long time readers of fantasy may have conflicting opinions on prophecy-driven stories. *There Will Come a Darkness* handles this genre mainstay in a way I find refreshingly thorough, establishing the role of prophecy not as merely a mechanism to make our protagonists special, but as a vital element of the world as a whole, its past as well as its present and future. The novel explores the fallibility of prophecy as well—the capacity for human error in interpretation and the ways in which everyday people navigate lives governed by predetermined fate and even more so how people react when that certainty is taken away from them. Many clichés are wonderfully woven into this story, played with in delightful and interesting ways.

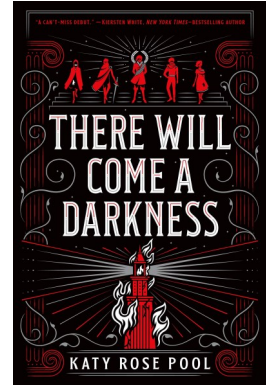
The world's magic system is less strongly defined. Those with magical abilities are called the Graced and can utilize one of four magical skills: scrying, healing, alchemy or artificing, or enhanced physical abilities. This system is fairly well balanced within the novel, with the characters having a mix of different abilities and strengths within those abilities (as well as several characters having no magic at all), but readers looking for a dense, complex magic system, complete with spells, potions, and magical creatures may not be satisfied with this one. The most interesting aspect of the novel's magic system is, once more, the way it integrates with the world and with the characters and their identities, as the Graced become targeted by a new religion that believes the world no longer needs magic or Graced who use those powers for their own gain.

Though I'm a big fan of this book's approach to history and worldbuilding, the barrage of places,

names, and terms can be a bit much sometimes in the way you sometimes see with first books in a fantasy series. *There Will Come a Darkness* is a first book in a lot of ways, though I wouldn't have known this was Pool's first book if I hadn't read it on the cover. The novel is very much the opening chapter of a larger story, and I found myself wishing

more was ready to devour when I noticed I was running short of pages. There were some characters and plotlines that I wish were given more room to breathe, as some of the POV characters are given more chapters than others—something I expect will balance out as more books in the series come out, but was still something I noticed while reading.

Still, between each of the main characters, this novel has a little something for everyone—a political struggle for Hassan, a moral struggle for Beru, a darker and more action-heavy story for Ephyra, a coming-of-age for Jude, and a struggle with trauma and fate for Anton, each differing tone united by a theme of identity and place. And all these stories take place in a world brimming with description and history and life—a world containing hardship, teetering on the brink of war, genocide, and outright apocalypse that nevertheless isn't given over to the recent trend of fantasy settings being relentlessly grim for the sake of grimness. The Pelagos, though facing its own problems, is refreshingly free from many of the social ills of our own world, rather than abusing marginalized identities as a stand-in for true realism. *There Will Come a Darkness* is a gripping, heartfelt, and delightful first chapter in a new series that I look forward to following for years to come. Book two is set to release September 1st, 2020.



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