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## Pathfinders in Faerie

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## Mythcon 52: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico; July 29 - August 1, 2022

<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythcon/mythcon-52.htm>

These the legends we will tell you."

(Kalevala, XX, 1-4)

#### Footnotes

1. Tolkien, J.R.R., The Hobbit (New York: Ballantine, 1966) 61, 60, 203, 116. Hereafter noted in the text by page only.
2. Lady Gregory, Gods and Fighting Men (Canada: Macmillan, 1976) 266. Hereafter noted in the text by page only.
3. Das Nibelungenlied, ed. Karl Bartsch (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1866) stanza 10, line iv; my translation. Hereafter referred to in the text by stanza in Arabic numbers and line in lower case Roman numerals, as above.
4. Sturluson, Snorri, The Prose Edda, ed. and tr. Jean I. Young (Berkeley: University of California, 1954) 26.
5. Stanzas 2377, 1429, 294 and 1321.
6. Nibelungs, stanzas 12 and 1920; Tolkien, pp. 70, 192 and 68.
7. Lonrot, Elias, The Kalevala, tr. W.F. Kirby (New York: Dutton, 1977) 2 vols. in one, Runo XI, lines 1-2.

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# PATFINDERS IN FAERIE

## GLEN GOODKNIGHT

Tolkien's Middle-earth, Lewis' Narnia, and Williams' Broceliande have a similar quality. Chesterton and Lord Dunsany in their works called the place Elfland. There are many names for it; Faerie is probably better than most. It is a place of beginnings and separations. Some get lost there; others find paths to more ultimate realms. Faerie is like the unconscious mind. Tolkien says it has "both joy and sorrow as sharp as swords." "In that realm a man may, perhaps, count himself fortunate to have wandered, but its very richness and strangeness tie the tongue of a traveller who would report them." (c. f. Smith of Wotton Major).

In medieval legends, it was a third and middle place between Heaven and Hell, having elements of both as well as its own distinctive qualities. It is a realm of archetypes and wonders. We visit it nightly, and vaguely recall a small portion of our visitations. It is a realm filled with trivia and awesome, white-knuckling, power, in a pattern almost always beyond our comprehension.

Williams' sea-forest of Broceliande, in his Arthurian poetry, is such a place. We are told that beyond only a certain part of it is Carbonek, where the Fisher-King keeps the Holy Grail, and beyond that is Sarras, the land of Trinity. One can also find the way to the Antipodean Ocean, where the Headless Emperor reigns in P'o-L'u. Many a wanderer is not seen again; some come back as simple Holy fools; others as cranks and hucksters.

Ursula LeGuin has said (in "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie"): "A fantasy is a journey. It is a journey into the subconscious mind, just as psychoanalysis is. Like psychoanalysis, it can be dangerous; and it will change you."

She also says earlier in the same essay:

What is fantasy? On one level, of course, it is a game: a pure pretense with no ulterior motive whatever.... It is escapism of the most admirable kind — a game played for the game's sake.

On another level, it is still a game, but a game played for very high stakes. Seen thus, as art, not spontaneous play, its affinity is not with daydream, but with dream. It is a different approach to reality, an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence. It is not antirational, but pararational; not realistic, but surrealistic, superrealistic, a heightening of reality.... It employs archetypes, which, as Jung warned us, are dangerous things.... It is a real wilderness, and those who go there should not feel too safe. And their guides, the writers of fantasy, should take their responsibilities seriously.

We may say that there are two classes of admirers of Faerie: daydreamers and dreamers; gameplayers and

serious explorers. Those of the second kind, the dreamers and explorers, do not see Faerie as a thing unto itself, but a realm that leads to greater self-knowledge and an enlargement of being.

With these goals in mind, we are foolhardy to set off without charts, heedless of the discoveries of previous explorers, specifically here, the writers of fantasy. Many offer themselves as such who are unworthy of our trust, charming as they may initially appear. The genuine guides are invaluable in our quest, though we are to take their information with care and collectively. This alone is both a perilous and rewarding prerequisite for our quest, but it is much less demanding of us ultimately, than to step off into the realm of Faerie alone and ignorant.

How truly fortunate for us that guides proven reliable have given us a rich tradition and heritage, accessible and joyously warm, so that what might have been a terror, sadness, or disaster, instead can be a Festival in Faerie.



## LEAVES BY TOLKIEN

The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien, selected and edited by Humphrey Carpenter with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981, 463pp..

Have you ever wished you could ask Tolkien questions about his works? Here we have the next closest possibility: Tolkien's answers to many who wrote him asking questions. Some of the answers are brief; others, in the Tolkien style, are quite long and detailed. This volume will be indispensable to serious readers and scholars in shedding new light, or clarifying textual problems, in Tolkien's works. It is a gold mine that holds much rich treasure for his admirers.

While the majority of the material deals with his works, it is more than that. Here we get a solid indication of his personality: crusty, paternal, inflexible, opinionated, orthodox, charming, compassionate. We see a man able to delve into the smallest details and see the Grand Design at the same moment. His university life, relations with the Inklings, political and cultural opinions, unshakable faith, and family concerns are all well covered. The book has an excellent set of notes and an index, but it really needs to be read from cover to cover to capture its full value and unfolding drama.

This is not meant to be a full review, which should follow later, but a brief initial reaction, as it is just being released. This is an important book, of which much will be said for many years.