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The Cartography of Fantasy

Abstract
Discusses the various physical settings possible for a work of fantasy, some more integral to the work than others. Notes the influence of Tolkien's maps on the genre, and the usefulness and importance of such maps to other fantasy works.

Additional Keywords
Fantasy literature—Maps; Fantasy literature—Settings; Tim Kirk; Bonnie GoodKnight
THE CARTOGRAPHY OF FANTASY
R.C. WALKER

Fantasy charts for us worlds which are not our own; worlds far removed from us by time, space, different orders of reality, or some combination of them. Thirty years ago it might fairly be said that charts or maps of these other worlds were rare; even though very often spatial concepts of these realms might have existed in their creators’ minds or even (as in the case of Lewis or Burroughs, for instance) in their notes.

This situation has very largely changed by the appearance of Lord of the Rings. Tolkien’s maps are probably the best cartographic representations which have ever been published with a fantasy novel or series. Not only have they set a high standard, they seem to have created an interest in fantasy maps...so that a map has become almost de rigueur in new and reprinted fantasy. Some of these are, as might be expected, paltry imitations (of which Urshurak and The Sword of Shannara are the most obvious and tedious examples). Another example of the popularity of maps is J. B. Post’s An Atlas of Fantasy, now in its second (revised) edition.

The Post Atlas, a valuable reference source, makes clear another fact: that what we need is not only more maps of the lands of fantasy, but better maps as well. It is not uncommon for maps to be made which incorporate some details from the text but which ignore others. Maps of this sort have been widely published depicting Grand Motholam, Oz, Witchworld, Darkover, and other places. Maps should conform as closely as possible to the texts.

Generally speaking, fantasy settings are of four types:

1. Divorced from our space-time continuum. Narnia in this type of setting, as are Dunsany’s “Third Hemisphere” and Lovecraft’s “Dreamworld.” It’s harder to classify Coramonde, Prydain, Oz, Newhon, and similar places, but they would seem to belong here as well.

2. Worlds in other solar systems. Of this type would be Witchworld, Pern, Darkover, Reglathium, Tschai, Silistra, and Kregen, for instance.

3. Worlds in our own system. Of this type would be Barsoom, of course; as well as other fantasy versions of Mars, Venus, Gallisto, Mercury (as in The Worm Ouroboros), and (like it or not) Gor.

4. Earth. Fantasy settings in our own world (where maps would be needed) may be noted under three categories:

4a. Distant past. Here lies Middle-Earth. Here too is Atlantis, Mu, Lemuria, Poseidonis...and perhaps also the Young Kingdoms of Michael Moorcock (although the text suggests these may not be exactly in our space-time continuum). Here too are Hyperborea and the Hyborian Kingdoms.

4b. Mythical locations in and around our own time. Here we may find Brobdingnag and Lilliput, and more recently Graustark, Stradhenn, Grand Fenwick, the Triune Monarchy, Zembla, Poictesme, perhaps Xanth (also perhaps Oz), and beneath us Pellucidar.

4c. Distant future. Near the end of time lies Xothique and Grand Motholam, as well as Hodgson’s “Night Land.” More near to our own time are the recognisable worlds of Moorcock’s Runestaff/Count Brass novels and Adams’ Horseclans books.

None of these lists is all-inclusive. Furthermore, it will certainly be disputed whether some of these settings are truly in the realms of fantasy. Yet it must be observed that the precise definition of that word is moot.

The most definitive statement on the subject is probably Tolkien’s essay. Yet even here we become involved in difficulties. Can it be doubted that the Xothique tales of Clark Ashton Smith and the Dying Earth tales of Jack Vance are truly fantasy? Yet they are in no sense catastrophic! They represent the dark side of Faerie, but are of that realm, notwithstanding. If we turn to the Darkover stories, we find no magic, no fantasy in the usual sense of the term...and yet in its rejection of modern technology Darkover is a fantastic realm and the tales seem to me full of recovery, escape, and consolation. If we knew less of the mechanics of the powers of the Comyn, would we not call them “magic”? There are two other intelligent races on Darkover, who might be reckoned as its elves and its orcs. In a way, therefore, by another door, it seems we have entered Faerie.

Leaving aside the ambiguous question of what constitutes fantasy, I would not like to return to the question of geography. In fantasy stories generally (although not with complete universality), the geography of the setting plays an extremely important role in the story. To return to the fantasy story par excellence, Tolkien’s great trilogy is in many ways dominated by the geography of his world.

This heightened “sense of place” is one characteristic which seems to be common to most fantasy. In order to make his setting more real to us, the writer gives it a wealth of detail...whereas in science fiction, the author is usually more concerned to convince us by the wealth of his technological invention and consistency.

Thus War of the Worlds could be convincingly laid...and has been laid...in London, or New York, or Los Angeles; or, for that matter, in any large urban center familiar to the reader or viewer. The setting is only a stage-drop, a way of orienting the reader.
But *The Lord of the Rings* could not be laid in any setting other than Middle-Earth. It is intimately and inextricably connected to its setting. Thus the creation of a convincing setting in which the events to be narrated will take place may be seen to be a basic act in the art of writing fantasy.

The creation of an accurate visual representation of the fantasy setting may thus be a considerable aid in the understanding and enjoyment of a fantasy tale. That this is so can immediately be seen in the enormous impact Tolkien's maps had on his readers. I can recall my first contact with the trilogy, and avidly following the printed narrative and the maps at the same time. I can also recall my initial disappointment with other works in the fantasy field which did not have maps.

It would be useful, then, to have available reasonably accurate maps of many fantasy settings. *Paster's* *Atlas* is an admirable start toward that goal. But his is a collection of reprints, and as such prints only what is available and of course does nothing to correct any faults or inaccuracies which might be in the originals. (And many of the maps had nothing to do with the literature of fantasy as it has been discussed here.)

We should aim, therefore, at the compilation of new maps of fantasy tales where sufficient detail exists to draw them and for which good maps are not now available. These should conform as exactly as possible to the authors' texts.

There would be no need in this to tackle Tolkien; his own maps are definitive. There is little need to go over Narnia again... despite a few details which do not conform to the text, the Pauline Baynes map may be regarded as covering that field. But many remain. I have worked in several of them and hope to present the results of that work in a series of short article/map combinations.

These items may represent some departure from the main objects of the interest of the Mythopoeic Society. But I hope they may be excused in that they explore a fundamental aspect of fantasy in general: how the lands lay.

Cavalier Treatment — continued from page 36

primacy. His testing came with the death of his first wife. Machen has recounted this remarkable episode in *Things Near and Far*:

"I was beside myself with dismay and torment; I could not endure my own being. And then a process suggested itself to me, as having the possibility of relief, and without crediting what I had heard of this process or indeed having any precise knowledge of it or of its results, I did what had to be done..." We are left to infer that he attempted a spell of arts, remembered from his occult delvings; the result — unexpected — he insists the spirit that wall trembled and the pictures on the wall shook and shivered before my eyes ... It is not quite just: trembled, dilated, became misty in their outlines; seemed on the point of disappearing altogether, and then shuddered and contracted back again into their proper form and solidity.... That day and for many days afterwards I was dissolved into bliss, into a sort of rapture of life which has no parallel that I can think of... touch became an exquisite and consoling pleasure; I could not so much as put my hand on the table before me without experiencing a thrill of delight...." The phenomena continued for days. A species of migraine that had plagued the author all his life vanished, never to return. The pain in his feet, all the hea iny feeling that a feel of resiliency — a "delicious" effect, Machen assures us: "Great gusts of incense were blown in those days into my nostrils, odours of rare gums seemed to fume before invisible altars in Holborn...."

"... The utmost that I had hoped from my experiment was a temporary dulling of the consciousness which I received was not mere dull lack of painful sensation, but a peace of the spirit that was quite ineffable, a knowledge that all hurts and doles and wounds were healed, that that which was broken was reunited."

But let me here say firmly that I consider an act of kindness to a wretched many kitten to be much more important." It is one the most striking statements of spiritual priority I have ever read; "powers" and even transcendent euphoria are discerned as subordinate in the scheme of earthly life, and Machen, for all his spells and alchemies, for all his sporting with supernal horrors, puts himself firmly on the side of elemental good. The Christian set the occultist firmly aside and never seems to have regretted the decision.

(To be continued)

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NOTES

Mae govannen, foreign friends:

The Princes, Knights, Dames and Commons of Forordir, The Tolkien Society of Stockholm, greet you! Wandering minstrels have sung great songs of your deeds and doings, and therefore we have the pleasure to invite you to our Tolkien Feast, coinciding with our 9th Year Jubilee, on the 27th–30th of May in the Year of Our Lord 1981.

The Celebration will begin with a Tolkien exhibition in our House of Culture, including a lecture and a debate, singing and dancing. It will continue with a massive banquet. We also plan to organize a Carnival, a Picnic and visits to places of historical interest around Stockholm.

At the moment we cannot tell the exact costs of the banquet, nor the minor details of the Feast itself. What we can tell is that a) It will take place, b) You are invited! We would appreciate a reply before the end of this year. New and full information about the Tolkien Feast will be sent out to anyone interested well in advance of the great event.

Namsarie tem mamentsla! THE GRAND COUNCIL OF FORORDIR

Send all replies and enquiries to Martin Stuart, Essinge allén 13, S-112 69 Stockholm, SWEDEN. Accomodation with members of our Society can be arranged, please inform us of your needs.

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