Stefan Ekman
University of Gothenburg

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Entering a Fantasy World through Its Map

It is there, right at the beginning of a considerable number of fantasy novels: the map. An illustration that shows the reader a strange world, a setting for adventures as yet untold, or at least unread. Created as part of the author's world-building endeavours, it holds information about the imaginary world awaiting in the text, information which would be of use to critics who take on the task of analysing that text. But can a fantasy map provide any useful insights into the world it portrays without a previous understanding of the text? If so, what could a critic hope to learn about the world, and through what method?

In chapter 2 of my book *Here Be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings*, I investigate fantasy maps and the role they play in fantasy novels, and detail a way in which to analyse them. In that chapter, I include an examination of what previous research has been published on the subject, and take both a quantitative and a qualitative approach to fantasy maps. Although I conducted some minor analysis of maps from texts with which I was not familiar, my main qualitative analysis, or "close-reading", of the maps in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–55) was carried out in tandem with the text. Analysing a map with basis in a text that I knew well seems in line with what Audrey Isabel Taylor and I would later argue to be the way that critics look at world-building: from a perspective where they know the text in its entirety (Ekman and Taylor 11–12). And even though I maintain that you "[omit] a significant part of the work" (Ekman 67) when you analyse a text without its accompanying map, it is possible – indeed, common – to do so. Does this mean that the opposite practice – to analyse a map without its accompanying text – is also possible, however? For this article, I decided to test and develop my approach to close-reading a fantasy map, using a map

from a novel where I had no prior knowledge of the text. I wanted to see what could be inferred about an imaginary world from the map alone. The method I used and the results of my experiment are presented and discussed below. First, I will provide some theoretical background to fantasy maps as cartographical objects, however, as well as a brief presentation of the novel that I have used for the experiment.

Fantasy literature has long made use of maps in its construction of imaginary places. In a letter to Naomi Mitchison, Tolkien writes that he "wisely started with a map, and made the story fit (generally with meticulous care for distances). The other way about lands one in confusions and impossibilities, and in any case it is weary work to compose a map from a story" (177). Tolkien suggests that the map is primary and the story secondary, at least in fashioning the geographical setting. This is perhaps particularly true when the setting in question is a secondary world, a fantasy world different from the world with which the reader is familiar. The map may not be created with Tolkien's "meticulous care for distances" and may, like in Tolkien's case, have to be redrawn by a professional illustrator later, but it is still part of the "authorial world-building" (Ekman and Taylor 10). The map is a tool for the writer, but it is also a tool for the reader, and, indeed, for the critic.

As useful as they are in bringing imaginary places to life, maps of such places are troublesome cartographic objects and may not even be maps at all. I have observed how discussions about the way in which maps (in general) work often have a tendency to assume that maps are *representations* of the actual world's geography (Ekman 19). A case in point is the definition used by the International Cartographic Association, according to which a map is a "symbolised representation of a geographical *reality*, representing selected features and characteristics, resulting from the creative effort of its author's execution of choices, that is designed for use when spatial relationships are of primary relevance" (17; my emphasis). When it comes to a fantasy map of a secondary world, there is no "geographical reality" involved, and thus no representation as such. Moreover, it can be argued that a representation is always secondary to what it represents – there can be no map unless there is already a world for it to map – whereas maps of imaginary worlds, as Tolkien suggests, can, or even ought to, be primary in some respect: the world comes into being as it is being mapped (for a more detailed discussion, see Ekman 19–20).

Not only does cartographic theory offer tools with which maps of imaginary places can be analysed, it also provides theoretical underpinnings for how maps help bring imaginary places to life. In *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, Denis Wood explains how, during the 450 years after the publication of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), "the use of maps to lend credence to imaginary places would explode" and that in the twentieth century, "the mapping of imaginary places swelled into an Amazon at flood" (36). He also suggests that the maps of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* "inspired anyone with a pen […] to start making maps of imaginary worlds" (37). Wood's main interest concerns maps that represent physical geography rather than how maps can "lend credence" to imaginary places but in *The Natures of Maps*, he and John Fels discuss how the idea of the map as representation can be replaced by that of the map as a system of propositions, as an argument (xv–xvi). A *fantasy* map argues that there is an imaginary place such as it describes, regardless of the fact that it has no basis in "geographical reality" and does not *represent* anything in the actual world. This propositional nature of maps in general is a result of the attitude that Western culture has developed to them. "[T]he modern empiricist paradigm of cartography," Matthew H. Edney observes, "has determined the nature of the relationship between the modern individual and the map […] and, through the map […], to the territory" (24). Edney describes this relationship between individual, map, and territory with reference to maps that represent a geographical reality, but if a map is a proposition about a place rather than a representation of one, I submit that the modern paradigm of cartography affects the way in which people regard a map of an imaginary place as well. The fantasy map is used as a stand-in for imaginary places in the same way that other maps stand in for "geographical reality". The map may not be the territory, as Alfred Korzybski famously pointed out (58), but it implies the existence of territory.

Wood captures this implication very succinctly, offering a useful way to think also about fantasy maps. According to him, all maps assert that *this is there* (*Rethinking* 53; see also Wood and Fels 28 f.), and this locative proposition "nestles within it the ontological proposition, *this is*" (56). In other words, a map is in itself a claim that whatever is on it somehow exists. Every map creates a world, or part of a world, and I would argue that this is particularly true for maps of imaginary places. The map of a secondary world is a powerful suggestion that the mapped world exists, at least in some sense. And, as I have pointed out before, because a map is the result of its creator's conscious and

unconscious choices, assumptions, and priorities (Ekman 50–51), I would like to add that every map includes yet another message: *This is what there is like*. A map can tell the reader or critic what is important in its world, what is worth bearing in mind, what readers and critics should pay attention to.

Brandon Sanderson's young-adult novel *The Rithmatist* (2013) was selected for this map-reading experiment for the simple reason that it has a map and I was in no way familiar with the text. After my initial analysis of the map, I found out that it is set at the Armedius Academy in the United Isles. The Academy teaches both regular students and Rithmatists, students who are skilled in the magical art of bringing chalk drawings, chalklings, to life. The story is a whodunit, in which the disappearance of Rithmatist students must be solved by the main characters, against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict between the humans who settled here generations earlier, and the wild chalklings that originally inhabited the United Isles but are now pushed back to a single island.

At first glance, Ben McSweeney's map of the United Isles (included in the published version of this article) portrays an alternative-word version of North America, where the U.S. states and Canadian provinces are islands in a continent-sized archipelago. The margins are richly adorned with various surround elements, including a compass device; a title ribbon; text and an arrow pointing out locations off the map; a certificate; a legend, or key, of Rithmatic Academies; a bar scale; and an elaborate seal. Of the names of the islands, eight clearly signify what is Canadian territory in the actual world, and a further two suggest non-U.S. territory to the south (Mexica and New Espania). Two names label groups of islands: the Californian Archipelago to the west, and the Floridean Atolls to the east.

To discover what a fantasy scholar could infer about an imaginary world from its map and without reference to the text, I carried out an experiment. By methodically reading the map of an unfamiliar fantasy novel, and afterwards comparing the analysis from that reading with what the text says about the world, it would be possible to gain insight into the role a map could play in a critical reading of a fantasy work. To enable others to adopt, adapt, and improve on the method for map-reading used here, it and the process of interpretation used have been described in some detail.

Close-reading is building an interpretation by analysing details in a text and their implications. Close-reading a map works in a similar fashion: details and their implications matter, even though the sign system used is different (for an in-depth discussion of the semiotics of maps, see Wood, *Power* ch. 5). In our essay on critical world-building, Taylor and I argue that a critic constructs the world by combining an analysis of details with a holistic perspective. Reading a map requires the same double perspective: all the map elements need to be considered as details, as well as part of a totality.

Maps contain a number of rough categories through which they can be approached. They all have an author, a subject, and a theme (Wood, *Power* 22). They portray some form of topography or "spatial relationships" (Intl. Cartographic Assoc. 17): landforms and their interrelations. Most include linguistic signs that name and describe. And many contain surround elements of various types. Each of these categories are discussed for the United Isles map (in the order above), including my initial interpretations and comparisons with what text later contributed, confirmed, contradicted, or confuted. Although focus will remain within a particular category at the time, the holistic view of the map means that elements from other areas are brought in whenever relevant.

Author, Subject, Theme

All maps share some basic characteristics, which offer a useful place to start in a close-reading of a fantasy map. Wood calls attention to how every map has an *author*, a *subject*, and a *theme* (*Power* 22–25) and in *Here Be Dragons*, I demonstrate how these can provide interesting starting-points for reading the Shire map in *The Lord of the Rings* (44–55). The subject of the *Rithmatist* map is the United Isles, as declared by the map title and stressed by the countries to the north and south being rendered in featureless black. The map's author is less obvious, but the certificate and the seal of cartography suggest that the map should be read as existing as part of the world of the text. More precisely, it is an illustration by an actual-world artist (Ben McSweeney) referring to an intradiegetic map created by an equally intradiegetic (and unnamed) cartographer in the secondary world. The theme, finally, appears to be the location of the Rithmatic Academies, but is also the location of the various islands of the United Isles. The three

characteristics thus offer a place to begin the close-reading, but they tell us very little about the world.

The extent to which a fantasy map refers to, or can be read as, an intradiegetic map is central to the propositions the map makes about the world. Like the map in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, a fantasy map can refer unequivocally (and explicitly) to a map in the story. I have previously used a concept from document studies to analyse such a map: the *doceme*, a part of a document that can be analysed separately but always in relation to the entire document of which it is part (Ekman 21; drawing on Lund 23). The map of the United Isles, the many Rithmatic diagrams and instructions, the illustrations, and the text are all docemes of the document *The Rithmatist*. Alternatively, the fantasy map may just as clearly reside outside of the diegesis and provide a guide to the reader, such as the map in Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960), which charts the route the characters take through the course of the story, thus demonstrating that it is likely not the work of an intradiegetic mapmaker. The map provides a liminal space between the actual world of the reader and the world of the story. Gérard Genette refers to such "verbal or other productions" as *paratexts* (Ekman 20; drawing on Genette 1). Most fantasy maps are not *either* paratextual *or* docemic but can be explored from both perspectives.

Topography

Similarities in topography between the actual world and a fantasy map can provide analytical guidance, but they can also be misleading. Looking at the United Isles map, readers familiar with a map of actual-world North America would recognise the resemblance in outline between the United Isles and the coterminous United States. They would realise that the United Isles alludes, topographically, to the United States just as the name "United Isles" alludes to "United States". Both landforms and map title boldly lead readers to expect some similarities between the *Rithmatist* world and the actual world, geographically and historically. At the same time, the map contains more subtle signs that should make its readers cautious about what assumptions they make about the rest of the world. The first such sign is the bar scale found south of the islands of New France and Georgiabama. Assuming that miles are of roughly the same length as

in the actual world, it can be used to calculate the area of the United Isles (the white grid on the sea area with twenty-by-twenty-mile squares is helpful here). Doing that shows the area to be only about a quarter of the corresponding area in the actual-world North America. This serves as a reminder not to make assumptions based on topographical and linguistic similarities: the mapped area only shares superficial topographical similarities with our world. Furthermore, there is nothing that suggests that the world off the map is more similar to the actual world than the archipelago is similar to actual North America. From the map, it is only possible to say that the *Rithmatist* world is a secondary world that is different from the actual world but with some features in common with it.

In fact, the United Isles map does not appear overly concerned about the rest of its world. Ordinarily, land masses that obviously stretch beyond the map's edges indicate a world outside of the mapped area (Ekman 28–29). Such is the case with this map as well, but the black land to the north and south diminish rather than draw attention to any importance the rest of the world may have. The topographic resemblance to the actual world is striking enough for readers to extend the world beyond the map: Europe, Asia, and South America are implied, even though they may be as geographically different from the actual world as is the *Rithmatist* version of North America. The map's disregard for the rest of the world makes the one element to indicate something off the map all the more conspicuous.

The arrows pointing to Britannia and the JoSeun Empire offer information about the world beyond the map. Arrows pointing off a fantasy map to locations elsewhere anchor the area depicted in a wider world (Ekman 47), and on this map, such arrows indicate what are clearly important parts of the secondary world. Britannia is easily understood as referring to the *Rithmatist* version of Britain. The JoSeun Empire may not be as obvious to all readers, however. In the actual world, the Joseon Dynasty ruled present-day Korea from about the 15th through the 19th century. The arrows point *east* at JoSeun, in the same direction as Britannia, which is somewhat curious; one would have expected them to point *west*. One possible assumption, suggested by the dissimilarities between United Isles and the actual-world geography, is that the world on the map is flat; to proceed to the west means falling off the edge; Korea (and anywhere else) lies eastward by default. Explicitly flat worlds are not that common even among fantasy

maps, however, and although nothing on the map suggests a spherical world, neither is there anything to rule it out. And as the arrows point to Britannia *and* the JoSeun Empire, this suggests another possibility.

Assuming a round world rather than a flat, the counter-intuitive direction to the JoSeun Emprie and its juxtaposition with Britannia could be taken as an indication that the JoSeun Empire has expanded toward and into Europe. Although there are few details to confirm this, it is possible to suspect that the British monarch has escaped Britannia and established a new kingdom in the colonies when threatened by the JoSeun. The *Royal* Seal of Cartography from the Academy on New Britannia indicates a royal influence on the colonies. Canada is absent as a separate country. Has there perhaps been no War of Independence, leaving the United Isles as the remains of a Britannian empire?

The text does not quite bear this out. Two hundred years before the story's present, "King Gregory III had been forced out of Britannia during the JoSeun advance" but had lost his political power and become a religious leader who discovered Rithmatics, the magic of chalk drawings (Sanderson 77). A royal escape from JeSeun, in other words, but no new kingdom in the Americas. And the JeSeun advance not only forced out the King: although by no means central to the plot, the JoSeun Empire dominates the secondary world's culture. Europe has been JoSeun-ized: the text describes how professors who have studied in Espania or France "routinely wore JoSeun formal clothing instead of suits or skirts" (77), cementing the idea of a ruling colonial class. Food culture has adopted ingredients and habits introduced by the colonisers: traditional Italian food is "[s]paghetti mixed with fried peppers, mushrooms, water chestnuts, and a tangy tomato soy sauce" (171), served with parmesan cheese and eaten with chopsticks. In light of this, the map element is more than a suggestion that an Asian Dynasty has colonised Europe – it offers an ironic comment on European imperialist history, by having Europe being colonised by an eastern empire.

There are privileged positions on maps, and location can therefore be used to signify story relevance. In a culture where reading is done from left to right and top to bottom, one such position is the top left corner; another is the centre of the map (Harley 66; Black 37–39; for a fantasy example see Ekman 30–31). This is where readers first look on a map, and any reading of a map should check these positions. Quite close to the centre of the United Isles map, on the island of Nebrask, there is a black dot, labelled

"The Tower". In a privileged position, and the only sign of its kind, the Tower is obviously of great relevance, although the nature of this relevance is unclear. Someone familiar with fantasy tropes may suspect a Tower on a map to house a mighty wizard, as stated by Diana Wynne Jones in *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* (202), or even a Dark Lord. In *The Rithmatist*, the Tower of Nebrask is never visited, but is nevertheless the centre of the conflict: it is the base of the wild chalklings, the main threat to the people of the United Isles. The Tower drives the plot and casts a figurative shadow over the story; it is quite rightly one of the most prominent map features.

One general map feature whose meaning remains unclear (and which is not explained by the text) is the grid visible in the wavy shapes signifying water. It is tempting to see this grid as a graticule, but it differs in look from actual-world graticules, where longitudinal and latitudinal lines are drawn over both land and water (and predominantly in black). Furthermore, a graticule is spaced by degrees rather than with uniform (map) distance, as on the *Rithmatist* map. If interpreted as a graticule, it carries the implication that there is no map projection, or rather, that the map represents a flat world rather than being a projection of a sphere onto a flat surface. Only then would distances be uniform over such a large area. Explicitly flat fantasy worlds are rare; but curvature is often ignored on fantasy maps and I have found that between two and three quarters of all fantasy maps lack that information (Ekman 30). The grid may not be a graticule or demonstrate a flat world, but as demonstrated above, it provides a useful way to calculate the area of the map.

Linguistic Signs

The many linguistic signs do much to aid the reader's understanding of the *Rithmatist* world. Not including the surround elements, there are 61 linguistic signs, divided into a simple hierarchy of two tiers: the 60 signs that name the islands of the United Isles, and the Tower on Nebrask. This rudimentary hierarchy suggests that the linguistic signs follow what Arthur H. Robinson and Barbara Bartz Petchenik term a "mimetic" (rather than "arbitrary") stylistic variation (61 ff.): on this map, a more prominent (larger) font suggests a larger, higher-level, referent. The larger names are broader geographical concepts (islands) than the smaller name (a location on an island). The map title would fit into this hierarchy, subsuming the 61 smaller names by its greater prominence in terms of position, size, and style. Although this map uses a very simple (mimetic)

hierarchy, other maps use more complex stylistic variations. The map in China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (2000), for instance, includes 118 linguistic signs divided over eight typographical categories. Other examples include Russels Kirkpatrick's *The Right Hand of God* (2005) and Steven Erikson's *Gardens of the Moon* (1999). I have previously commented on stylistic variation in *The Lord of the Rings* maps (53–54, 58).

Names in literature have a number of functions, which can be useful in reading a fantasy map as well as a text. Onomastics, the study of proper names, offers useful tools for analysing and interpreting fantasy names and the worlds they belong in. For a basic understanding of how the names of the islands function, I draw on Emilia Uusitalo's broad onomastic approach to fantasy names, which builds on and develops the functions other scholars have proposed that names could have in fiction (Ainiala, Saarelma, and Sjöblom 260–61; Bertills 165–85). Apart from the *identifying* and *humorous* functions (distinguishing referents and entertaining the reader, respectively), most of the names on the United Isles map have *fictionalising*, *localising*, and *associative* functions.

The names on the map identify the United Isles as a version of North America, but, like the scale bar, also draw attention to how the secondary world diverges from the actual world. Through its localising function, a name refers to a specific time or place, and through its associative function, it alludes to referents in the actual world or in other works of fiction. Names on the United Isles map combine these two functions: names that are similar or identical to names in the actual world create associations to places and people and, together with topographical similarities, establish a sense of location for the islands. The island names are those of, or allude to, actual U.S. states and Canadian provinces (for example Manitoba, Ontaria, Texas, West Carolina) or other geographical or social referents (for example Huron, Rocky Mountain, Acadia). Some islands have names derived from smaller regions or population centres in the actual world: Tulsa, Decatur, Kokomo, Jasper, and several others. Such names connect the world of the map strongly to the world of the reader, sometimes suggesting disparity between the worlds by slight changes in spelling, by using a historical name, or by naming an island by some geographic feature rather than state. These differences in form and/or referent stress the fictionalising function, the aspects of a name that make its referent feel fictional, something which, according to Uusitalo, reinforces the immersion in (particularly) a secondary world. The combination of functions that the names of the islands have thus

contributes to the relationship between the secondary world of the map and the actual world of the reader. The paratextual nature of the map becomes accentuated – the reader links the diegetic world to entities outside of the diegesis, and the boundary between the imaginary and actual worlds becomes fuzzy and porous.

Through this combination of functions that the names have, something of the history of the secondary world is revealed. Just as the topography is a distorted version of the actual-world topography, the associative, localising, and fictionalising functions of the names distort the "*onomastic landscape*" (Ainiala, Saarelma, and Sjöblom 257) of the map. Through the nomenclature, distortions can be discovered in the history of the *Rithmatist* world. Naming islands after identifiable historical characters (Crockett, Pitt, the Carolinas, Georgiabama, Rhodes, Hudson) suggests that these people existed and are somehow relevant in the secondary world. Other names foreground the colonial history of the United Isles: New Britannia, New Guernsey, New France, New Espania, and New Holland all signal how the United Isles have been colonised by people from various European nations – and also confirm that Britannia, Guernsey, France, Espania, and Holland exist elsewhere in the world. Nuggets of historical information can be gleaned from how names diverge from the actual world: the name New Holland managed to stick somehow. Something happened between the French and English colonial forces to make Green Mountain the name rather than Vermont. The presence of the island of Acadia and the absence of one called Quebec suggest a different power relationship between the Acadiens and Québécois in the northern French settlements. The (seemingly) Latinate suffixes of several names (such as Calgarius, Cincinnatus, Armedius; Canadia, Ontaria, New Britannia) could indicate an alternative language history or relation between English and Latin.

The names on the map give the impression of a United Isles with a decidedly colonial past, an impression which the text tries to downplay. The European colonial powers recall the actual world: Britain, Spain, France, and the Netherlands have left their marks on the map, although under slightly different names – the text confirms that Britain and Spain are called Britannia and Espania in Sanderson's world (77). The various 'New' this or that, and the mixture of European and non-European roots in the names of the isles suggest that European settlers met with other cultures and possibly previous inhabitants. This land was not empty before the arrival of the European settlers, the map

seems to say; but it also devalues the original inhabitants, giving no hint about whether they are still present. The text is more explicit on this subject, saying that "much of America was uninhabited at the time of European arrival" (329), that "[e]arly North American explorers […] happened across an occasional native on the isles," and that reports of such meetings gave rise to many of the names (246). Text and map pull in slightly different directions here. The map displays names adapted from the languages of previous inhabitants, ascribing those inhabitants importance. The text undermines that importance and the clearly colonial past encoded in the map by constructing a past that does not include the invasion of a previously inhabited land. The native life-form – the wild chalklings – is portrayed as a clearly non-human Other that kills indiscriminately, alien enough to justify not only colonialization but eradication.

Surround Elements

A closer look at the surround elements not only indicates a certain technological level but shows how central technology is to the secondary world's culture. Gears, springs, and other mechanical components constitute distinctive features of the legend, the seal, and the certificate. The certificate is circular, with the number 1908 set inside a gear, on a six-pointed star, on a larger (or inside an internal) gear. The asymmetrical teeth on the innermost gear are striking: nine teeth at irregular points oddly contrast the three symmetrical shapes that make up the rest of the symbol. Although its significance is not obvious from the map alone, it came as little surprise that a circle with nine irregularly spaced points is an important form of Rithmatic defence (243). The six-pointed star is similarly difficult to interpret, and although the map stresses it as a relevant shape (it is also used as symbol for the location of the Academies), neither map nor text offered any further clues.

The design of the U.I.A.C. Inc. certificate suggests a possible way of "dating" the map (and presumably the story setting). 1908 could be interpreted as a date, and given the many other loose connections to the actual world, it could be taken to signify a historical period roughly equivalent to the actual-world early 1900s. An early twentieth-century setting is supported by the inclusion of "Inc." in the U.I.A.C. name, thus suggesting a fairly modern approach to corporations such as that which developed during the second half

of the nineteenth century in the actual world. The certificate's gear design and the many mechanical details in the seal and legend similarly indicate a technological society similar to that from around the turn of the last century.

The legend in the bottom right corner is adorned with a multitude of mechanical parts and a saurian creature of some sort is pulling on chains that run through the components. Wood is of the opinion that "the role of the legend is less to elucidate the 'meaning' of this or that map element than to function as a sign in its own right" (*Power* 101) and the *Rithmatist* legend supports this. It explains a single type of map element, the small six-pointed star, eight of which can be found across the United Isles. These are the Rithmatic Academies, and three things are worth observing:

First, the legend is among the most striking elements, its prominence declaring that the Rithmatic Academies are of great importance to the story. At the top of the list, Armedius Academy gives the impression of being the most important academy, an impression strengthened by Armedius also being found in the Seal of Cartography. It therefore comes as no surprise to find, a few sentences into chapter one, that Armedius Academy is indeed the main setting of the story.

Second, the legend offers a few more linguistic pieces of information. There is another mention of the French settlements on the northern isles, through the Académie de Montréal on Canadia, and two interesting references in Our Lady of the Circle Academy and Academia de la Rueda Divina, the divine wheel. Both names connect the circular and the divine. Circles, though not conspicuously foregrounded by the map, are central to the world and the story, not least in the form of Rithmatic defence circles or "lines of Warding". This becomes obvious when the reader leaves the map and turns the page. Right after the map comes the first of several pictures of Rithmatic diagrams, this particular one of the "Basic Easton Defence": a big circle with nine smaller circles attached to it at irregular intervals, recalling the gear of the U.I.A.C. Inc. certificate (9).

A third noticeable feature of the legend is the mechanical components that adorn it. The components suggest a fairly advanced device, possibly clockwork rather than heavy machinery, and powered not by steam but by a peculiar saurian pulling at chains connected to the mechanical frame. At first, this creature gives the impression of having wandered in from the margins of a medieval map. A closer look reveals an interesting

incongruity. Where the mechanical parts are drawn with detailed precision, the lizard-creature is more stylised. This becomes even more striking when it is compared to the Seal of Cartography. The map does not explain why such a creature is important, but it accentuates it. From the text, it quickly becomes clear that it is a chalkling, a creature drawn and brought to life by Rithmatists to serve some purpose, most commonly to attack or defend the Rithmatic circle in a duel or fight but also to provide mechanical power as labour (188).

Clockwork and mechanisms are clearly important in the United Isles' society, and although the map does not reveal the full extent of how magic and clockwork work in tandem, it certainly points in that direction. The legend is framed by components of various kinds, and the Royal Seal of Cartography brings home the point quite forcefully. Its basic shape is that of an English royal coat of arms, with a lion and a unicorn, rampant, clearly mechanical, and embracing two coils. The shield is topped by a cross, and rests on two crowned cherubim with cornets, blowing on another irregular nine-toothed gear in which a spiral-shape ending in a nib is inscribed. This map element draws attention to mechanical engineering and stresses how far mechanisms have developed and how thoroughly they are integrated into traditional culture. The text confirms this technological focus on clockwork. Neither chemical energy nor steam are major power sources. Gears tick inside dollar coins; trains, guns, and lamps are run by springs; and clockwork is used for very complicated creations, such as the Equilix, a mechanical horse powered by springs and with a clockwork brain (160).

The Seal is also one of several elements that in some way alludes to religion. Just like the names of the Santa Fe island and the two Academies mentioned above – Our Lady of the Circle and la Rueda Divina – the cherubim and cross suggest that some form of Christianity exists in the United Isles or at least that the society has a historical connection to Christianity. (According to the text, King Gregory III became a religious leader on his arrival in the United Isles [77], which can explain why the coat of arms has a cross at the top rather than a distinct crown.)

The final surround element is the compass in the top left corner. Without familiarity with the text, it is a shape which, like the saurian chalkling at the bottom of the map, the compass embellishments are easy to misinterpret. Fantasy novels generally contain some form of magic. As has already been mentioned, the magic in *The Rithmatist* is the

magic of making chalk drawings come to life. Not knowing that, the shape of the compass could come across as partly that of a crystal. As magic crystals are a fantasy staple, my original reading saw the device with its snakelike creatures writhing around it as an indication of magic for the wrong reason. A few pages into the text, I realised that it was not a *crystal* but a piece of chalk, and that the snakelike creatures were also chalklings – still indicating magic but in a way much more central to the story than I thought.

McSweeney's map in Sanderson's *The Rithmatist* is eminently readable without reference to the text. Through the map, it is possible to see a modern world relying on the technology of springs and gears in which a story concerning the Tower of Nebrask and the Armedius Academy takes place. And while the map clearly displays how unimportant the rest of the world is to the United Isles, it emphasises the importance of both Britannia and the JoSeun Empire. It shows a world in which colonialism and invasion are central issue to be dealt with, and offers an insight into the colonial past of the United Isles. Not least does the map draw attention to the fact that in fantasy, not everything that *looks* like the actual world turns out to *be* like it. Superficial similarities hide deeper discrepancies, but they do so by blurring the boundary between the world of the reader and that of the story. Displaying, as it does, a distorted version of the actual world, the map allows for an examination of the relationship between the fantastical and the actual in a broader sense and thus adds to our understanding of how a fantasy world can be constructed.

A map can bring an imaginary place into existence. Seeing maps as propositional rather than representational entities helps explain why fantasy maps are such powerful tools in creating secondary worlds. The method of reading fantasy maps set out in this article is grounded in an understanding of such maps as cartographical objects. Like all maps, they argue not only that the place they portray exists in some fashion, but that it has certain characteristics and embody a certain ideology. Information about that place can therefore be uncovered by reading the map. The understanding that could be gained about the *Rithmatist* world by establishing the map's author, subject, and theme, and then attending to its topography, linguistic signs, and surround elements was not comprehensive, and occasionally flawed. The close interconnection between religion,

technology, and magic became apparent only with the benefit of having read the text. On the other hand, the map offered a much stronger focus on the colonial theme. Leaving either text or map out of an analysis of the novel would make for a poorer analysis. Not every fantasy map will reveal the same amount or kind of information, but all fantasy maps have something to contribute to the understanding of the imaginary world if closely read – even if they are read before the text.

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