

Real Maps, Unreal Places: The Maps of Imaginary Places Collection at Cushing Memorial Library & Archives

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IT CAN BE DIFFICULT to attract students outside of the geosciences into a university map collection, even if it contains material that will help them with their research and studies. But unique and interesting material can bring in new users: holding “cool” maps that are culturally relevant and visually engaging provides an outreach opportunity to a wide audience. Maps of imaginary places, including those from famous and popular works of literature,

television, movies, graphic novels, and games, offer a new collecting focus within a map collection.

At Texas A&M, Cushing Memorial Library & Archives has been building an impressive collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy (SF&F) materials since 1974. Among the materials in its Science Fiction & Fantasy Research Collection are several maps drawn either from archival

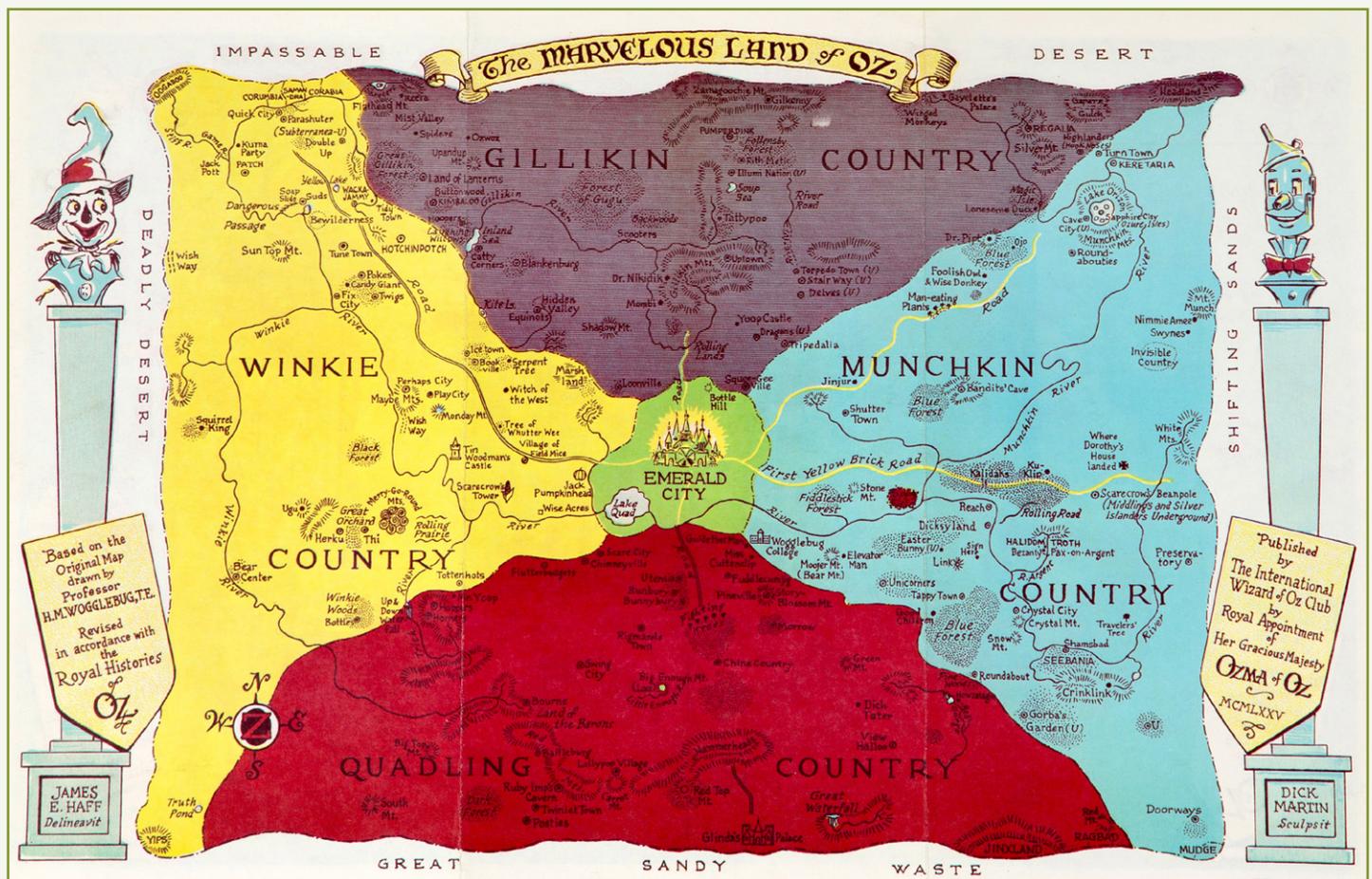


Figure 1. The Marvelous Land of Oz: Based on the Original Map drawn by Professor H.M. Wogglebug, T.E.; Revised in accordance with the Royal Histories of Oz, cartographer James E. Haff, 1975.

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collections or cataloged as individual library items. These maps tie into our research holdings and provide another way to view and approach science fiction and fantasy works. Some of them are the official maps for a universe, approved by the author or movie production company, while others are created by fans of the worlds they read about, watch, or play in.

Given the strong tradition of maps as visual aids or narrative devices in the SF&F genres, we reasoned that building a strong research collection should include adding maps as a larger component of it. So in early 2014, the SF&F Curator and the Map Librarian officially joined forces and began cooperating on the Maps of Imaginary Places (MIP) Collection. In order to showcase and publicize the collection, a formal physical exhibit, entitled “Worlds Imagined,” was proposed and accepted in August 2016.

The mainstay of the collection consists of maps drawn, in one form or another, from literature. Of course, due to the nature of the SF&F Collection, many of the maps in the MIP Collection are of fantasy lands or other planets. Some of these are not separate artifacts: they are included within the books in which they appear and include such varied worlds as Arrakis (*Dune* — Frank Herbert), Earthsea (*A Wizard of Earthsea* — Ursula K. Le Guin), and The Lands Beyond (*The Phantom Tollbooth* — Norton Juster). Others appear as individual maps, including storied fantasy worlds such as Narnia, Westeros, Middle-earth, and Oz (Figure 1). Both the collection and the exhibit balance out these famous geographies with lesser-known places such as Island Town (the *Children of the Drought* trilogy — Arianne “Tex” Thompson), Alera (the *Codex Alera* series — Jim Butcher), and The Stillness (*The Broken Earth* trilogy

— N.K. Jemisin). One of our hopes, when selecting materials for the exhibit, was that some of these lesser-known places might garner more attention from patrons, who hopefully will be driven to seek out new literary worlds to explore.

However, we do not limit the collection to maps from the SF&F genres. To this end, we acquired a map (admittedly a reprint) of Thomas Hardy’s Wessex. We also made sure to include one of the most well-developed non-SF&F fictional worlds, the Mississippi county of Yoknapatawpha created by William Faulkner (the map was drawn by Faulkner himself for the 1936 novel *Absalom, Absalom!*). We also display maps drawn from famous novels of adventure — the map used by Allan Quatermain to find his way to the fabled *King Solomon’s Mines* (H. Rider Haggard, 1885) and that drawn by Robert Louis Stevenson for his 1883 novel *Treasure Island*. Both these items represent another function of maps in literature: not simply describing a particular geography or tracking a route or quest, but serving as an active device that drives the narrative. The maps in these novels are of such importance to the plot that they are depicted in the books themselves, that the reader might be able to place themselves in the minds of their protagonists and feel a visceral thrill at being part of the story. That’s something much harder to accomplish when a world or a city or a route are merely described rather than cartographically displayed.

A highlight of the collection is the 1925 Bernard Sleight *An ancient mappe of Fairyland: newly discovered and set forth* (Figure 2). Sleight’s map displays a collective geography in which characters from mythology, fairy tales, and legend share a common land.



Figure 2. An ancient mappe of Fairyland: newly discovered and set forth, cartographer Bernard Sleight, 1925.



Figure 3. *Recentissima Novi Orbis Sive Americae Septentrionalis et Meridionalis Tabula*, cartographer Justus Danckerts, 1690.

Although the inspiration for the MIP Collection was born out of a longtime love for maps found in books, the collection also includes maps from outside the realm of literature. One of the most famous geographic misconceptions in the history of cartography is the representation of California as an island. This falsehood arose in the 16th century and continued to be reproduced on maps through the 18th century, even after explorers had proved that it was not its own land mass. We include Justus Danckerts' 1697 *Recentissima novi orbis, sive, Americae septentrionalis et meridionalis tabula* in the MIP because the map shows California as an island along with several other cartographic errors, including *Terrae Esonis* — a land bridge connecting North America and Asia; Danckerts' map is

the oldest piece in the collection (Figure 3). We also use the legendary tale from Garcí Rodríguez de Montalvo's 1510 novel *Las sergas de Esplandian* to discuss the fictional Island of California, a kingdom of warrior women who ride griffins and are led by the beautiful Queen Calafia.

There is rich cartographic material to be found in the universes of broadcast media as well. Our exhibit displays, for example, a map of the United Federation of Planets (from the *Star Trek* media universe), one of "The Verse" (from *Firefly*), and one of the Twelve Colonies of Kobol (from the SyFy Channel reboot of *Battlestar Galactica*). These last two are particularly fascinating and wonderful because their cartographers have taken a relatively scant amount



Figure 4. Exhibit attendees viewing the United Federation of Planets map.

of detail as given in their shows of origin and built creatively upon it, describing planets and entire star systems from vague or one-off references and vastly expanding on a universe's given geographical complexity. The Federation map, in a reverse phenomenon, telescopes a sprawling universe — built over the course of six separate television shows and a movie series — that the cartographers have reduced to a manageable size by stressing locations and events of particular significance to the overall *Star Trek* narrative (Figure 4).

Location and setting are a key part of the story and gameplay in video games. Most games include an in-game map which the player can access to determine their location and to find their next objective, and some games come packaged with a physical map. Several video game maps are held in the collection. Our most popular video game map, and one of the most requested items in the entire collection, is the map of Hyrule that came packaged with the Super Nintendo Entertainment System game *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*. This map is double-sided,

showing the Light World and the Dark World: two parallel worlds that the player travels between using the Magic Mirror. Another popular map from the collection was created by a student at Texas A&M for a class assignment, showing the relationships between Pokémon and their nature-based abilities. Other video game maps held in the collection include maps from *Fallout 4*, *Chrono Trigger*, the *Elder Scrolls* series, and the *Final Fantasy* series.

Beyond maps of fictional locations, the collection includes allegorical and intellect maps. Allegorical maps cartographically illustrate emotions, stages of life, and morals. Intellect maps trace an idea or thought on paper. *Carte du Tendre*, an allegorical map produced in 1654 (we own a reproduction), shows the path to love and the pitfalls that exist along the way. Jason Bradley Thompson's *The Map of Zombies* maps out different types of zombies found in media and pop culture. Thompson's map shows zombie types based on movement speed, intelligence, and how one would kill them, neatly presenting it all using imagery of the human nervous system.

We began work on the exhibit in October 2016, reviewing maps, atlases, and books in the collection to determine which items should be shown and to identify items we should purchase for exhibit. After assessing the collection and purchasing several new items, we created our master exhibit list which was comprised of 53 maps, 12 atlases, and 14 books.

Working with the University Libraries' Conservator, we designed a conservation treatment plan for the materials. Since much of the collection is new, only a few items needed treatment. Items were delivered to the Conservator for flattening, tear repair, tape removal, and custom support creation for display. After conservation, maps were taken to picture framers in batches over several weeks. While the maps were out for framing, we created custom stands for books and atlases using plexiglass.

Cushing Library has a long tradition of producing high quality exhibit catalogs that are free to exhibit attendees. For the "Worlds Imagined" exhibit, we continued this tradition, but with a few changes. Past catalogs were typically close to imperial octavo (8¼" × 11½") size, produced in muted color tones to match the historical materials on exhibit, and written to provide further information about the items on display. With our catalog, we chose to design it like a travel guide one would use while on vacation to a foreign land. The dimensions of the catalog are smaller (6½" × 9½"), and 96 pages, it is filled cover to cover with bright color, and each map is described as if it were a real location. For example, here is an excerpt of the entry for the map of Middle-earth:

Travel Middle-earth! Climb the trees of the Mirkwood forest or ride a barrel down the Forest River. Take care if you venture to Mordor, the ash plain of Mount Doom, this area is an active field of war — you don't want to be captured and eaten. If you are looking for a 5-star stay, check in at Rivendell, home to the elves. Also known as "The Last Homely House East of the Sea," Rivendell is famous for the hospitality it offers to travelers.

After initially considering a scholarly cartographic "expert" as the speaker for the exhibit opening, we decided instead to invite an actual fantasy cartographer, someone who had familiarity and experience with the various considerations that go into mapping a fictional world

and how to physically manifest those considerations in a map. We also wanted someone whose artistic work we both admired, and so we agreed on Priscilla Spencer as our speaker. Priscilla, a Texas-born filmmaker and artist, has created maps for a number of different fantasy authors including Jim Butcher, Seanan McGuire, and Kevin Hearne. The collection already had one of her maps, "The Realm of Alera and the Barbarian Lands" (from Butcher's *Codex Alera* series), and its creativity and detail had already won it a place in the exhibit. We purchased two additional maps of Priscilla's for the collection and all three are on display.

Priscilla spoke, using her Alera map as the main focus, about her process for creating her maps and the features of the landscape she considers, such as the effect of plate tectonics or concepts involving infrastructure — where would roads logically go? — and more subtle ideas such as the level of technology needed to produce different kinds



Figure 5. Priscilla Spencer speaking at the exhibit opening.

of maps (Figure 5). What should a map of a place look like, given the materials at hand within that world? Priscilla believes in making a map look and feel as if it had truly been created in the world it describes.

To date, the exhibit is enjoying substantial praise and success (Figure 6). We are gratified that so many people are finding or rediscovering the same love of fictional maps that we have, and it is our hope that this exhibit will shine a new and lasting light on the MIP Collection as a whole.



Figure 6. Exhibit attendees viewing the map of Ankh-Morpork.