

SUB-CREATING ARDA
Review by Ryder W Miller

Sub-Creating Arda, World-Building in J.R.R. Tolkien's Work, Its Precursors, and Its Legacies, ed Dimitri Fimi & Thomas Honegger; Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 2019. Paper, \$32.00. 490 pp. Cover by Jay Johnstone: Eru in the pose of of God holding a large dividers measuring the world, against a background of gold leaf; like a medieval illumination.

Some have argued that the Inklings, in particular JRR Tolkien and CS Lewis, were The Golden Age of Science Fiction. This is more likely a true experience for the non-secular and those who found an expression of Christianity in the Mythopoeia of these renowned writers. Others might argue that The Golden Age of Fantasy was in the late '70s and early '80s while Dungeon & Dragons was in bloom, when literary predecessors were being exhumed from obscurity, and those who were labeled "imitators" were creating their own sort of epic fantasy. Maybe the publication of The Silmarillion (posthumously in 1977) could be considered the beginning of this time showing the power of a marvelous writer and subcreator. The Inklings had a deeper and more traditional message. Middle-earth was a life's work for two Tolkiens. CS Lewis had a mission with Narnia also. These were some of the kinds of stories that the Inklings craved, but could not find, so they decided to write them. They sub-created, acknowledging divine inspiration, and many followed suit but for different reasons. To be found here is the painstaking effort that the Tolkiens went to, like Mary Shelley with Frankenstein, creating a very tough act to follow.

Sub-Creating Arda is star-studded with scholars and public authorial experts, and goes into great detail about the depth of creative efforts that went into Middle-earth. It is also about history as well as influence. The majority of the book, this one, Cormarë series (mostly about Tolkien) Number 40 from Walking Tree Publishers, is about Tolkien and Middle-earth. All sorts of aspects of his creation are explored here. One might ascertain that not only was Tolkien likely the writer of the century, especially for many, but he was also the probably the most thoroughly studied and might still have the largest fan base on the planet. One finds here discussion of his mythmaking, magical waters, poetry, the significance of maps, elements of story-telling, use of dialogue, the Mountain men, etcetera. For the Tolkiens, Arda was a life's work with many drafts, obstacles, and rewrites. Much has gone into excavating this tale from the psyche and annals of mythology. It seems so existent that one finds oneself journeying through a place that enchants one. The Tolkiens brought myth to life again and others sought to take us on journeys elsewhere also.

Following fourteen chapters about Tolkien, the length of many of the fascinating books in this criticism-fan series from Walking Tree Publishers, are half a dozen others focusing on other authors or contrasting them with Tolkien. There are the Brontës to consider, as well as Ursula K LeGuin, Michael Swanwick, Austin Tappan Wright, Andrzej Sapkowski's Witcher series, and Game of Thrones. Some of these books, like Tolkien, may need to be read twice, and one finds here influence and inspiration. Search and you will find, even probably for the picky something one will like, but many roads lead back to Tolkien, who like Lewis, had divine inspiration. Sad not to find more here about American authors Robert E Howard, Stephen Donaldson, and Terry Brooks. Also JK Rowling and Michael Moorcock. The book though is dense, hefty, but filled with wonder. The academic writing will not turn off those who have visited some of these places already.

Sub-Creating Arda will be helpful for those who want to create, visit, and understand imaginary lands, especially Middle-earth, which for some maybe it existed in some way because of the power of our imagination. As shown here we just are players in a much larger and crowded world. We can journey through other's eyes and see some of their ruminations with this. There are many paths, not all well trodden.

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