Storyworld Spatiality

by Becky Anderson

Recently I read Colin B. Harvey's *Fantastic Transmedia: Narrative, Play, and Memory Across Science Fiction and Fantasy Storyworlds* and I was immediately enamored. It examines the manner in which several storyworld franchises engage with and extend across various media platforms to attract and heighten the interest of their respective audiences and fan bases. It contains a chapter that addresses the recent Jackson film adaptations of Tolkien's universe. Since my initial encounter with the text, I've been working through some questions about how spatiality and place-making factor into the adaptation of a Secondary World with a specific focus on game-based adaptations of Middle-earth. As such, this week I'd like to consider and begin to dig into the tropes of medievalism that can be seen in various iterations of Middle-earth video game adaptations (although in the interest of time, I may have to limit my scope to *LOTRO*) and, more broadly, in early iterations of heroic adventure games.

I'm specifically interested in a game's topographic transfer of a Secondary World into the chosen medium and how the adapted layout of that world into the game impacts player experience.

The following are the primary questions I'd like to concentrate on:

- How has Tolkien's fantastic theory influenced the creation of other fantastic/heroic/epic storylines that operate outside of the Secondary World of Middle-earth? How does it impact and play out in other universes?
- How does space influence and interact with the social? Do players connect in the game world? What are the parameters by and around which these connections are

bounded? What do I value and seek out: experience of game space or experience of social interaction?
- Do I have to consider fidelity (I personally think this is a silly construct by which to evaluate an adaptation)? Should a deep commitment to the narrative be observed or be necessary? Or is a deep commitment to the visual familiarity of the Secondary World enough? Does this include a cartographic commitment to and geographic continuity of the layout of the larger storyworld as it is described in the text or source/parent medium?

The following are the secondary areas of inquiry I'd like to explore depending on where the direction(s) of my primary questions take me:

- What platform(s) do I focus on? Does the platform change the delivery of the adaptation?
- What heroic adventure games will I start with? In what ways do the medieval tropes construct the gameworld?
- Do I account for the influence of any external outliers on the adaptation? How do I handle them or how do they factor into my analysis? For example, Aragorn in *LOTRO* looks like Viggo Mortenson even though his appearance and physicality is not in keeping with Tolkien's in-text description of Aragorn AND even though Turbine did not have license to reproduce or pull content from Peter Jackson's film adaptations…
- Does the player character (and even non-player characters) act as witness to the histories and customs of the Secondary World? Or am I simply imposing this possibility onto the avatars because we (in "reality") are (re)makers and (re)producers of cultural memory? There's probably something to be said here or at least a line of inquiry to pursue here regarding the agential capacity of avatars…
- What if an upgrade makes changes (however small or

widespread) to these particular aspects (histories and customs)? And how do I account for glitches? What is the process involved in tracking these changes? Is such a tracking possible? To what effect? Does the gamer act as witness to these changes?

- Is there an archival process relative to collecting and curating or even simply noting the upgrades or iterations of a particular game and how the differences between those upgrades manifest in and effects player experience?