

### **N. Trevor Brierly**

#### **Discerning Worldbuilding Design Patterns in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien**

A “design pattern” is a formalized description of a common problem in a field of endeavor which is accompanied by a recommendation towards a solution. The term “design pattern” was introduced in the architecture classic "A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction", published in 1977 by Christopher Alexander and others. Alexander and his colleagues were interested in discovering and codifying architectural elements that result in a building, neighborhood or town being “alive”. They developed a system (a “design pattern language”) of design patterns which described ways of designing buildings and urban areas to make them pleasant and “soulful” places to live in. Other fields of endeavor have developed design pattern languages. Software engineering has developed a pattern language over the past 35 years which describes recommended approaches to solving common problems while designing computing software. There is growing interest in discovering and identifying design patterns in other fields of creative endeavor besides architecture and software design. In particular, the art of worldbuilding, of designing new secondary worlds, could benefit from the discovery and identification of best practices and the formulation of design patterns and a pattern language. Such a pattern language would be useful guidance to authors, game designers, enthusiasts worldbuilding as another “secret vice”?) and others who are involved in the design of secondary worlds that need to be believable and have the illusion of depth. Design patterns are discovered or identified by a combination of the observation of successful solutions in the “real world”, as well as introspection and experimentation. Examining the work of successful creators of secondary worlds may uncover design patterns applicable to worldbuilding. This paper will examine worldbuilding best practices in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien, one of the most successful worldbuilders of all time, and see how they can be formulated into design patterns and contribute towards a pattern language for the creation of secondary worlds.

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