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Quebec City as Portrayed in *Guardian: The Lonely Great God* (2016)

La Ville de Québec dans *Goblin* (2016)

Sangjun Jeong / Judit Nagy

Abstract

Lee Eung Bok's fantasy TV series, *Guardian: The Lonely Great God* (2016), partly uses contemporary Québec City for setting. Tourism may be an underlying motive, which articles on the reception of the series published in leading Quebec media seem to confirm. With this background information and the genre-specific features of the series in mind, this paper aims at exploring how Québec City is portrayed in *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*. The analysis will demonstrate that positive images prevail regarding the city in every aspect of fantasy, which contributes to making Québec City an attractive place for prospective Korean and other East-, and Southeast Asian visitors.

Keywords: Lee Eung Bok, Québec City, *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*, tourism

Résumé

En partie, la mise en scène pour la série télé fantastique, *Goblin* (2016), est la ville contemporaine de Québec. Les articles sur la réception des séries publiées dans les médias québécois semblent confirmer que le tourisme est un motif sous-jacent. L'article va explorer comment la Ville de Québec est représentée dans *Goblin*. L'analyse démontrera que des images positives prévalent concernant la ville dans tous les aspects de la fantaisie. Pour attirer les futurs visiteurs coréens et ceux d'Asie de l'est et du sud-est, cette image fait l'impression que la ville de Québec est un endroit attrayant.

Mots-clés : Lee Eung Bok, la Ville de Québec, *Goblin*, tourisme



Introduction

The setting for fantasy-related works is oftentimes remote in space and/or time. The most typical such locations include Medieval Europe and ancient historical places or imaginary near or distant future/futuresque locations. To provide a few recent examples of films and television series, Guy Ritchie's *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword* (2017) has England of the Middle Ages as its setting, Gary Shore's *Dracula Untold* (2014) takes us to 15th-century Transylvania, the 2016 TV series *Roman Empire: Reign of Blood*, Kevin Reynold's *Risen* (2016) and Daniel Lee's *Dragon Blade* (2015) are set in Ancient Rome, Alex Proyas's *Gods of Egypt* (2016) takes place in Ancient Egypt, whereas the 2016 American TV series *Colony* is future-based.

However, Lee Eung Bok's TV series *Guardian: The Lonely Great God* (2016) partly uses contemporary Québec City – an actual location in North America for setting. In an article published in *Le Journal de Québec* on December 16, 2016, Cédric Bélanger reveals that the episode, in which Québec City featured for the first time was watched by 15 million viewers in Korea, and *Guardian: The Lonely Great God* has the potential of reaching 500 million to one billion viewers in East-, and Southeast Asia, which he comments on as “monumental visibility for the city of Québec.” What is more, Destination Canada – a Canadian federal organization whose mission is to promote tourism – paid \$600,000 (Canadian) to attract the production to Québec City while Air Canada and Chateau Frontenac invested \$200,000 each. On whether the investment is yielding any rewards, Bélanger quotes Anna Lee, the Seoul representative of Destination Canada: “Many fans of the series talk about Québec City in the social media. The interest in Québec, a city Koreans have not known before, can be sensed immediately.”

Yet, in spite of the fact that Québec City as an actual location forms part of the setting, the drama series fulfils Katherine A. Fowkes's criterion of fantasy films as a genre: it displays more than “isolated moments of fantasy in otherwise realistic or dramatic contexts,” since its “imaginary elements pervade the entire story” (“Fantasy Films”). Or, to refer to Moorcock and Clute and Grant's observations on the distinctive features of the genre, nor does *Goblin*'s setting serve simply “thematic purposes” or the “underscoring of moods” (Moorcock 73); indeed, it is far from being a mere “backdrop or arena [...] dissociated from the actions played out upon it” (Clute and Grant, 341). As Clute and Grant note, “the setting of a fantasy work is often of great importance to the plot and characters of the story” (558), and Québec City seems to function in that capacity in *Goblin*.

The authors' research centering on the various roles Québec City fulfils in *Guardian: The Lonely Great God* therefore has been motivated by both the above described tourism-related aspects and genre-specific characteristics of Lee Eung Bok's fantasy TV series.



1. Tropes of fantasy relevant to the series

In *The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, Clute and Grant mention magic as the most prevalent element of fantasy, the frequency of which “varies from [...] legend, through to rare but available to the well connected, up to a ubiquitous part of everyday life” (615). Magic can be manifested in various ways. For one, it can be a skill practised by “qualified professionals such as wizards or sorcerers” (616),¹ resulting from which, among many other consequences, objects may come about or disappear. Naturally, an object itself can also possess magic qualities. According to genre-related literature, such as Lissauer’s *The Tropes of Fantasy Fiction* or Fowkes’s *The Fantasy Film*, swords, hats of disguise, books and rings are frequently relied-upon objects to this end. Magic deriving from magic objects is not always exercised or activated instantly and/or knowingly. In other cases, the special power of objects lies in their catalyst-like capacity to trigger actions rather than in their performing the actions themselves. In addition, Clute and Grant note that certain objects in fantasy films and TV series may convey a special meaning or message, which is of vital importance to both plot and the characters. Their ‘magic’ lies in providing a clue, an instant compass for characters and audience alike to enhance their navigation of the fantasy world. In an abstract form, maintaining their status as plot device, they become “self-fulfilling prophecies” (798).

Another indispensable trope of the genre is the presence of a secondary world “whose connection with our present day world ranges from nominal to non-existent. It could be the remote past or future, or simply a-historical. The inhabitants can be anything from human only, through the standard elves, dwarves and orcs, to a complete Fantasy Kitchen Sink (“Fantasy”). Fantasy worlds themselves are often magic places, which, at the same time, need not necessarily be entirely fictitious. However, even if they do not realize an entirely different, self-contained realm, they all seem to possess an ‘out-of-place aspect,’ a ‘fantasy differentia specifica,’ which “sets them apart from the ordinary” (Westfahl 1017), whether it be out-of-place objects, buildings, creatures, characters, milieu, actions or principles governing this world. One way to reach fantasy worlds is by means of travel in time or space. In some cases, featuring as a destination, fantasy worlds can form the hero’s quest, or function as “locus amoenus” (Clute and Grant 793) representing the ideal or the idyllic, a desired place for the hero/ heroine to be, where happiness awaits them. Messengers may be employed to guide the characters there, providing them with direct or indirect clues.

Finally, yet another inherent genre-related feature of relevance to our purpose is the mythology pertaining to or governing the fantasy world. In Clute and Grant’s interpretation, this may include stories, legends, common knowledge and

1) Sometimes, characters are provided with a magic quality by a higher power (Anderson and Miesel, 270).



various wisdoms, which may also be employed as regional markers thereby contributing to the creation of a sense of place. The hero's quest itself may be a central part of this mythology, whether it aims at saving the given fantasy world or at self-realization.²

2. Analysis

As a next step, let us reveal how the above specified tropes appear in the series in connection with Québec City.

2.1 Magic objects

At the end of Episode 1, Goblin and Ji Eun Tak arrive in Vieux Québec through a magic door opening from a Korean high-school library after they bicker about whether Ji Eun Tak deserves the title 'Goblin's Bride' or not. Goblin is surprised to find Ji Eun Tak with him, asking: "Did you just follow me through that door? How ... did you do that?" At first, Ji Eun Tak believes that she is in Province Village in Paju, South Korea, and it is her turn to be surprised when Goblin tells her where they are: "Canada... You mean, the place with the maple leaf? The one in North America? Is this really a different country? Can you do this, too?" The magic door serves multiple purposes in the TV fantasy series: it opens to a faraway place as epitomized by Québec City, where Ji Eun Tak finds a refuge from her unhappy life with her aunt's family, it demonstrates that Goblin can move in space, it serves as evidence for Ji Eun Tak that Goblin is not an ordinary character while it alarms Goblin that Ji EunTak may not be a regular human being, either.

Upon their first visit to Québec City, Goblin has some business to attend to, which takes him to the tombstones of Parc du bastion-de-la-reine with a changing incision and/or picture on them. The names appearing on the tombstones are surprisingly in Romanized Korean, and, on the next occasion Ji Eun Tak is visiting the city, she discovers that one of the incised names is identical to the name on the business card she got from Deok-hwa's well-to-do grandfather in Korea. Also, she assumes the one tombstone without a name must be Goblin's. Both the tombstones themselves and their location – Parc du bastion-de-la-reine marks the historical site where the Battle of Quebec took place in 1759 – accentuate the arduous nature of the journey Goblin has been undertaking.

During their second stay in Québec City, Goblin performs feats of innocent magic at Fontaine de Tourny to entertain Ji Eun Tak, which result in objects such as the

2) The hero's quest can manifest as "self-realization" (Clute and Grant 796).



fountain water sword – a sword made of the water of the fountain – or the pedestrian crossing with white stripes turning red when Ji Eun Tak's steps onto them. Not only do the magic and the resulting objects emphasize the idyllic and at places romantic mood of the journey, but they also provide moments of comic relief in the face of the drama unfolding.

A few Québec City-related objects with a special power to trigger actions inhabit the fantasy world of the TV series, too. For example, Ji Eun Tak admires a stylish mailbox placed in Hotel de Chateau in Episode 2, where she places a letter upon her next visit. Nine years later, when she is trying hard to regain her lost memory of Goblin, she finds the letter she sent from the same mailbox among her belongings in Korea. This is exactly what starts her on her journey to Québec City, through which her past – and along with it, memories of her relationship with Goblin – will emerge.

Also, from her first visit to Québec City, Ji Eun Tak takes home a souvenir booklet with the highlights of the city. When her aunt finds it, she comes to believe that Ji Eun Tak wants to desert them and leave for Canada. As Ji Eun Tak is not in a position to explain her adventures to her aunt, she chooses to face her foster family's fury. Later on, along with the letter she has sent from Québec City, the booklet will be instrumental in setting her on her journey there to find out about her past.

In Episode 4, when Ji Eun Tak decides to write the letter referred to above and place it in the mailbox in front of Hotel de Chateau, she presents Goblin with a book of poetry to read so that he does not get bored while waiting for her. Goblin's gaze falls on a poem. Reading it in the idyllic surroundings of Fontaine de Tourny, Goblin becomes fully aware of his feelings for Ji Eun Tak. The last line of the poem, "it was my first love" will be a recurring sentence from here on. Most importantly, Ji Eun Tak will jot it down on a piece of paper together with a brief description of Goblin's physical appearance before her memory of him is erased.

As for objects with a special meaning/ message, the most prominent one is the maple leaf. Upon her first arrival in Québec City, Ji Eun Tak refers to Canada as "the place with the maple leaf." A few shots later she is shown running around kicking and chasing falling maple leaves in a park and teasing Goblin: "if you catch a maple leaf, you will fall in love with the person who you are with," which foreshadows what will happen later in the story. Back in Korea, Ji Eun Tak laminates the red maple leaf she collected and brought home from Québec City³, and intends to offer it to Goblin as a present. However, due to a quibble between them, she places it in the book *Colourful Goblin* in a bookstore and leaves it there. When she tries to retrieve it an episode later,

3) Ironically, in the series, Québec City is linked to the maple leaf, a Canadian national symbol, though Québec has a history of observing itself as 'a distinct society' identifying with the fleur-de-lys. This may be suggestive of either the scenario writer's lack of regional sensitivity, or, quite on the contrary, it may be a conscious choice of the film-makers to brand both Canada and Québec City at the same time in order to meet sponsors' expectations.



it is gone, but luckily, Deok-hwa returns it to the store complaining that he does not need a book with someone's memories in it. After Goblin is finally presented with the maple leaf, he beholds it as a token of Ji Eun Tak's love for him, and is shown later looking at it absorbed in daydreams. Thus the maple leaf represents Canada and Ji Eun Tak and Goblin's love at the same time and in close connection: it is a remnant of the location of their secret adventures and their feelings for each other.

Upon one of their Québec City 'dates,' Goblin buys Ji Eun Tak a silver necklace as a souvenir with the inscription meaning "a match made in heaven." When Ji Eun Tak travels to Québec City to find out more about her past, she is wearing the same necklace, and an elderly lady reveals to her that nine years before she sold the necklace to a handsome young man who meant it as a present for his love. Thus the necklace functions as another Québec City-related clue helping Ji Eun Tak piece together the puzzle of her past love.

Finally, when Goblin takes Ji Eun Tak to the elegant restaurant in Vieux Québec for the second time, he experiences a vision: he sees her nine years later in the same restaurant with a radiant smile on her face waiting for someone she calls '대포님,' from which Goblin concludes that Ji Eun Tak will have forgotten about him by then. No matter how the plot turns and how the context changes, the vision will remain, and will eventually prove to realize a self-fulfilling prophecy. Much to Goblin's surprise, however, he will be the person Ji Eun Tak is calling out to in the restaurant.

2.2 The out-of-place aspect

Québec City as a location also produces examples of the out-of-place aspect in *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*, though to a much smaller extent. One such example is the Korean-owned hotel by the side of Chateau Frontenac, where the staff speaks flawless Korean to the guests. Similarly, as has been mentioned earlier, the tombstones with the Romanized Korean names seem equally out of touch with reality, just as it is quite unlikely for a waiter to greet customers in English in Vieux Québec, a dominantly French-speaking part of Canada. These discrepancies contribute to making Québec City as a place more 'fantasy worldly.'

2.3 Destination

As has been stated above, Goblin and Ji Eun Tak get to Québec City through the magic door between the high-school library and Vieux Québec first. In Episode 4, Goblin takes Ji Eun Tak out for a beef dinner in his car driving on a road in Korea which leads



miraculously to Québec City. At the end of Episode 5, they reach Québec City from the porch of Goblin's house in order to eat dinner at the same restaurant. These means of fantasy world travel with Québec City as a destination are juxtaposed to the real-world mission trip Ji Eun Tak undertakes to find her lost memories of the person she once loved, where the Air Canada poster and airport shots employed also amplify the real-world nature of this trip. Moreover, when Ji Eun Tak finally remembers Goblin, she is worried about returning to Korea using a fantasy means of travel on the ground that, in that case, she would have no stamp in her passport and thus would get into trouble with the authorities.

Québec City can also be seen as the embodiment of the *locus amoenus*, "an idealized place of safety or comfort" (Russell, 21) in *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*. It is remote, it functions as a refuge -- which Ji Eun Tak's spontaneous "I am happy here!" also reinforces --, and the city's strong connection to the romance⁴ between Ji Eun Tak and Goblin is apparent, it symbolizes the fulfillment of their love. It is by Fontaine de Tourny that Goblin becomes aware of the crush he has on Ji Eun Tak. Goblin initiates their second visit to Québec City to compensate the girl for his harshness resulting from the discovery that she is able to see the invisible sword penetrating his chest. Similarly, before their third visit, judging from Goblin's behaviour, Ji Eun Tak arrives at the conclusion that he intends to use her as a mere instrument to rid of the sword.⁵ Thus, on this occasion, Goblin's dinner invitation to the beef restaurant in Vieux Québec can be interpreted as his attempt to appease Ji Eun Tak and an escape from the conflict that arose. Later on, the city will mark the place of Ji Eun Tak's re-discovery of her relationship with Goblin just as it will become the location of her first encounter with Goblin in her new life. Thus, in *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*, Québec City appears as a place of romantic bliss for Goblin and Ji Eun Tak, free of calamities; nor does it ever rain there. (Rain would signify Goblin's sorrow.)

Although Québec City is an urban location in essence, Ji Eun Tak mistakes it first for Province Village for its charming small town character and pastoral echoes. Indeed, based on the images presented in the TV series, it is more natural to associate Québec City with the countryside than with a North American metropolitan city. In addition, the shots introducing the city at the beginning of Episode 2 display all three classical *locus amoenus* elements⁶: trees (Parc Samuel-Hollande near the city gate with a handsome Canadian ghost), grass (Parc du bastion-de-la-reine with the tombstones) and water (River St Lawrence and Fontaine de Tourny). Moreover, witnessing Goblin

4) Evans stresses the connection between *locus amoenus* and romance in his article entitled "Paradise's Only Map": The "Topos" of the "Locus Amoenus" and the Structure of Marvell's "Upon Appleton House." Also, Clute and Grant define *locus amoenus* as an idyllic setting, "often one in which a romantic encounter occurs" (793).

5) To her question, "Do you love me?", he responds "I will, if you need me to" (Episode 5).

6) See Russell, 21.



and Ji Eun Tak's budding love, the park with Fontaine de Tourny equally satisfies this condition.

As Goblin keeps making Québec City his destination, the city provides evidence of his passing through time, as well. The tombstones of Parc du bastion-de-la-reine mark long-dead acquaintances Goblin used to meet, just as he catches a glimpse of Ji Eun Tak 10 years into the future sitting at a table in their favourite beef restaurant, where she is waiting for an unknown man who will turn out to be Goblin himself. What is more, when Ji Eun Tak comes back to life 30 years later, she meets Goblin again at the tombstones of Parc du bastion-de-la-reine.

Last, Québec City as a setting also has messengers to guide Ji Eun Tak and Goblin on their mission to find each other. The elderly lady at Porte Prescott recognizes the necklace Ji Eun Tak is wearing and provides her with information which will be instrumental in her remembering Goblin, whereas the concierge at Hotel de Chateau prepares Goblin for Ji Eun Tak's comeback in her next life as a high-school student: "Pay attention to Korean students – they are very noisy."⁷

2.4 Mythology

Recurring through the series as flashbacks, some of the Québec City-related items catalogued above contribute to generating the fantasy world mythology of *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*. The most important such item is the maple leaf. The connecting fantasy world common wisdom has it that if a person is kicking maple leaves, he/she will fall in love with the person he/she is with. Even though the maple leaf is a Canadian national symbol, and the red maple has also inspired Korean poetry, neither culture possesses the common wisdom Ji Eun Tak cites in Episode 2. What it holds – thus conceived in the fantasy world - will come true; its validity is verified by Goblin and Ji Eun Tak's example.

The scene at Fontaine de Tourny can boast a similar myth-generating capacity. Goblin's fountain water sword magic, the pedestrian crossing with the white stripes changing red as Ji Eun Tak steps on them, the poetry volume with the line "it was my first love" bear testimony to the innocent and pure feelings Goblin and Ji Eun Tak have for each other. Capturing the happiest and most unspoiled moments of Goblin and Ji Eun Tak's relationship, which the idyll of this locus amoenus also mirrors, the echoes of this scene will resonate throughout the series.

7) Indeed, when Goblin exits the hotel to take a stroll among the tombstones of Parc du bastion-de-la-reine and sits down to read on his walk, his attention is distracted by a Korean girl dressed in a high-school uniform. She is holding a dandelion with the florets blowing off. Her recognition of him is immediate: "I found him," she says.



In addition, the tombstones lending Goblin's past historical depths, Goblin's vision in the Vieux Québec restaurant realizing a self-fulfilling prophecy, the elderly lady's story of the necklace with the inscription "a match made in heaven" all function as myth-building blocks in the fantasy world of *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*.

3. Conclusion

As has been demonstrated, Québec City, a real location, is home to the fantasy world of the TV series *Guardian: The Lonely Great God* in many different ways. First, it can be associated with magic through various objects such as the door opening to the Petit Champlain district, the tombstones at Parc du bastion-de-la-reine, the fountain water sword and the pedestrian crossing with white stripes turning red at Fontaine de Tourny, the mailbox at Hotel de Chateau, the Québec City souvenir booklet, the book of poetry with the line "it was my first love," the laminated maple leaf, and the silver necklace with the inscription "a match made in heaven." Second, instances of the out-of-place aspect and the fact that the city can be reached by fantasy means of travel contribute to making Québec City as a real location more 'fantasy-worldly.' Third, the city functions as a locus amoenus where Goblin and Ji Eun Tak find happiness and a refuge from the turmoil their lives are thrown into. In addition, Québec City has benevolent messengers who work towards reuniting the 'Goblin couple,' just as it also provides evidence of Goblin's passing through time. Finally, as shown above, the contribution of the city to the fantasy world mythology of the TV series is conspicuous and significant. To sum up, in *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*, Québec City features as a 'fantasy worldly' place through several tropes characteristic of the genre. These appear in a rich 'web of relations,' "of great importance to the plot and characters of the story" (Clute and Grant, 558). Moreover, and in accordance with the Canadian intention to promote tourism from Korea and East-, and Southeast Asia to Québec City, the featured fantasy roles assigned to the city in the series are markedly positive.

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