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Figure 1. Map of Philip Pullman's alternative Oxford for His Dark Materials series. Reproduced by permission of the author.



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Maps have origins and publishers, and this map of an alternative Oxford comes complete with its own provenance, so to speak. I invented a publishing firm, Smith and Strange, and gave them an address in the same street as those occupied, in the “real” world, by my publisher David Fickling. The map purports to come from a series called The “Globetrotter” (“I would not travel without a ‘Globetrotter’ in my cartridge case,” says a useful endorsement by Sir Henry Armstrong), and the full list of Globetrotter publications includes maps of The Kingdom of the Clove Islands, the trade routes of Muscovy, the Empire of Peru, and the Electorate of Zimbabwe.

But Smith and Strange don't limit their publishing to maps. There is also a list of recently published books, ranging from learned tomes such as “The Proto-Fisher People of L'Anse aux Meadows,” by Leonard Broken Arrow, D.Phil., F.R.A.S., to sensational true tales of adventure such as “A Prisoner of the Bears,” by Jotham Santelia.

An attentive reader of *His Dark Materials* might remember Professor Santelia turning up in the same dungeon as Lyra when she was imprisoned by the armored bears on Svalbard; and a profoundly attentive reader might remember his obsessive grudge against a Professor Trelawney, arising from some obscure academic feud. Well, the very next book to his in Smith and Strange's list is called “Fraud: An Exposure of a Scientific Imposture,” by Professor P. Trelawney.

If the two authors ever come face to face in the offices of Smith and Strange, no doubt they will have much to say to each other. In addition to the map, I wanted to include a page from an imaginary guidebook, and who better to imitate than Baedeker? The designers did us proud, printing both recto and verso in authentic-looking type on a scanned empty page of old paper. I did give a slight clue: Baedeker in our world is spelt like that, but in this book I gave him an extra C. I was happy to

see one reviewer referring with lofty familiarity to “a genuine page from Baedeker.”

The point of all this was to fill out Lyra’s world both backwards, towards His Dark Materials, and forwards in the direction of what will come next. In the backwards direction, the thing I enjoyed most was the boring postcard. I have long admired Martin Parr’s extraordinary book called “Boring Postcards,” which is exactly that: reproductions of genuine postcards illustrating highways and shopping centers and cafeterias and the like. I thought we could put together a boring postcard of Oxford, to show (as if by coincidence) a number of places referred to in His Dark Materials. One distinctive feature of the real Oxford is the line of hornbeam trees at the northern edge of the city, where Will first finds the window into the world of Cittàgazze. Here they are, and here is the bench in the Botanic Gardens where that story came to an end. The very last thing in the book points forwards. I spent an enjoyable day in the Bodleian Library, looking through the shipping brochures in the John Johnson Collection of printed ephemera, and concocting a fake—but I hope enticing—description of a cruise to the Levant in S.S. *Zenobia*, of the Imperial Orient Line, and listing all the delights of the voyage. I was particularly happy with Carlo Pomerini and his Salon Serenade Orchestra. Readers who peruse this closely will notice a scribbled addition, hinting at an appointment; but that is another story.

Author Philip Pullman’s (highly successful) His Dark Materials trilogy has been recently staged in London, and is about to be made into a film. He is a prolific, versatile Oxford-based author who also cares deeply about educating children in the pleasures of literature.