

Card, Orson Scott. The Lost Gate. New York: Blackstone Audio, 2011.

An important element that defines the difference, for me at least, between fantasy and science fiction has to do with the potential for events or actions in the book to actually occur or become possible at some point in the future. Science fiction contains ideas, events, and activities that have a potential for becoming reality, if not in my lifetime, then sometime forward of that. I put Star Trek into that category. I consider it possible that space travel, transportation from point to point, phasers, universal translators, androids, etc., are in our future (Einstein notwithstanding regarding travel at more than light speed). Science fiction novels often take place in some future time, but sometimes in the present.

Fantasy, on the other hand, contains elements that have what I consider such low potential for reality that they are "fantastic." Waving a wand and saying some words won't ever, I believe, cause a feather to rise in the air or a patronus to be conjured to protect one from a dementor (no matter how much I enjoy the Harry Potter books). Nor are there magical families among us. Fantasy is also very often set in the past, and sometimes in the present.

The Lost Gate is labeled Sci-Fi by Blackstone Audio, but to me it is fantasy. It is set in the present. There are cars and telephones and computers and Walmart stores. Many of its characters are part of families that are descendants of mythological gods and goddesses. The North family, with main character Danny North, is what remains of the Norse gods, and their head of family is always called Odin. The Greeks, as they are called, have someone named Hermia. Other families are mentioned: the Persians, the Sanskrits, etc. All these families are on Earth because they ended up on the wrong side of a gate from their home world when a trickster on the other world closed the gate 1,400 years before.

In these families, almost everyone has magic power of one sort or another, and education is about teaching the young ones to develop that power, or magery. What is of greatest interest is the birth and later identification of a gate mage, one who can create gates that can be used to move from one place to another. Moving through a little gate strengthens and heals a person. Moving through that gate to the other world would cause a person to become so powerful that s/he and the person's family could dominate all others. Danny North is thought to have no powers at all, until he realizes he is creating little gates and moving through them. His life is in immediate danger, because by treaty with all other families a gate mage will be put to death to keep any family from becoming dominant. His flight from his family and development into a great gate mage are half this story.

Meanwhile, back on the home planet, there is another whole society going on. The setting is not what would be considered present day, but some centuries back. Most people in this society have magical powers, too. And it is where the trickster who closed the gate is located, even if he doesn't know he is that person.

This book ends quite abruptly, and does not satisfy. Apparently, another book will continue the story. The audiobook had an interesting delivery: two readers, one for each planet.

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