

mythprint



The Monthly Bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society

VOL.49 NO.2

FEBRUARY 2012

WHOLE NO.355



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Cover Art: *Hobbit Tree*, by Jef Murray.

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Jason Fisher
Editor, *Mythprint*

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Send other Correspondence to:

Edith Crowe, Corresponding Secretary

[REDACTED]

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Mythprint is the monthly bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society, a nonprofit educational organization devoted to the study, discussion, and enjoyment of myth and fantasy literature, especially the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams. To promote these interests, the Society publishes three magazines, maintains a World Wide Web site, and sponsors the annual Mythopoeic Conference and awards for fiction and scholarship, as well as local discussion groups.

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“The artist doth protest too much, methinks.”

By Troels Forchhammer

It was with great interest that I read Ruth Lacon’s reviews of the 2011 Tolkien Calendar with Cor Blok’s artwork both in *Amon Hen*¹ and on the *Tolkien Library*² website. Her insightful comments allowed me to connect with the artwork in a way that I had not previously been able to, and to appreciate what Blok was trying to achieve. While unlikely that Blok’s pictures will ever be my favorite Tolkien illustrations, I can now enjoy them, for which I am immensely grateful to Ms. Lacon.

It was thus with a great deal of interest that I jumped at the opportunity to read the essay from her hand on illustrating Tolkien, “To Illustrate or Not to Illustrate? That is the Question...”³ published on the *Tolkien Library* website.

The experience of reading obviously varies from reader to reader — for me one of the most profound moments of reading Tolkien came when I read his description of Secondary Belief in ‘On Fairy-Stories’: this is *exactly* how I feel when I read a book, and here I finally encountered a text that put this experience into words. Many readers, including, I believe, Tolkien himself, get vivid mental images when reading, but I don’t — the occasional flash, perhaps, of something impressionistic, but no more unless by painstaking construction bereft of any Secondary Belief; for me the enchantment is in the words themselves. Tolkien was, therefore, absolutely right, for me, when later in the essay, he said that ‘However good in themselves, illustrations do little good to fairy-stories.’ For me a word more often says more than a thousand pictures than the other way around.

Realizing that my reading experience is not universal I readily accept that illustrations for many readers may do something good even in a fairy-story, and I certainly agree with Ruth Lacon that the idiosyncrasies of the author need not restrict us today; with illustrations as well as with, for example, source criticism, it should not matter what the author may have thought — what should matter is the actual effect on the reader today; whether it helps the reader to ap-

preciate the work better.

Lacon is, I believe, correctly identifying the *kind* of imagery that was acceptable to Tolkien as images that do not “overdefine” the visual realisation of the story for the reader. I was also struck by Ms Lacon’s excellent argument that in the current situation, the imagery of the New Line Cinema films (now ten years old) has created precisely the kind of single overdefining imagery that Tolkien wanted to avoid — a short time spent on the internet browsing some of the many sites for fan-art will show just how pervasive the most recent films’ imagery has been — and while I suppose that one might choose to merely sit quiet until it goes away (deploring the generation of readers who will be ‘lost’), I don’t think that strategy will work in the long run: new films will be made, and new generations will then be influenced as the current one is. For that reason I find myself agreeing with Lacon’s call for a great variation of visions in a hope to free the imagination of the viewers from one single visualisation.

Agreeing so strongly with the general views that Ruth Lacon expound in the essay, I find it a pity that she weakens her own case in places with poor or fallacious arguments — notably when trying to prove Tolkien wrong.

Noting Tolkien’s comments to Cor Blok about not wishing a single defining vision of his work in the way that John Tenniel’s vision has defined Lewis Carroll’s *Alice*, Lacon carefully explains exactly how the situation came about with respect to Alice. Having explained this, however, she fails to recognize that rather than proving Tolkien wrong, she has proven that he was right in saying that it *could* happen, and that the key appears to have been precisely the author’s wishes — something that she is evidently trying to convince us not to adhere too closely to with respect to Tolkien.

Later in the essay, Ruth Lacon comes close to accusing Tolkien of iconoclasm, citing, in an appeal to authority, a ‘respected Catholic theologian’ known to take Tolkien’s work seriously. The argument, however, seems to me to rely on a failure to recognize the gulf that Tolkien saw between sub-creation and Creation: a gulf as

wide as that which he saw between God and Man. The argument is made possible because Tolkien is not always making the distinction explicitly, but I think the argument is nonetheless specious for ignoring this distinction, which Tolkien possibly thought too obvious to mention. In every situation where Tolkien speaks of illustration, he is speaking of illustration of fantasy, fairy-story and sub-creative literature, and while he also calls the Gospel a fairy-story, this is, to Tolkien, clearly not sub-creative, and is thus not encompassed by his comments on illustrations.

The failure to acknowledge this distinction between the refracted light and the single white appears to me, in context, to be part of an unnecessary attempt to discredit Tolkien's views on illustrations as stated in 'On Fairy-Stories' and to Cor Blok. Ultimately I believe it is mostly a question of Tolkien describing and basing his arguments on his personal reading experience — for me it works, but his experiences clearly cannot be generalised to also encompass Ruth Lacon's — at least not in this respect, and criticising his views as non-universal on this basis would appear to me a more viable path.

The suggestion in the final part of the essay of an open-competition calendar with Tolkien-inspired art to complement the well-known single-artist official calendar is one that I would dearly like to see put in place. Other calendars do exist, but few of them are by multiple artists (there is the *Beyond Bree* calendar, but are there any others?), and none of them are anywhere near as well-known as the official calendar. ≡

¹ *Amon Hen* no. 228, March 2011

² www.tolkienlibrary.com

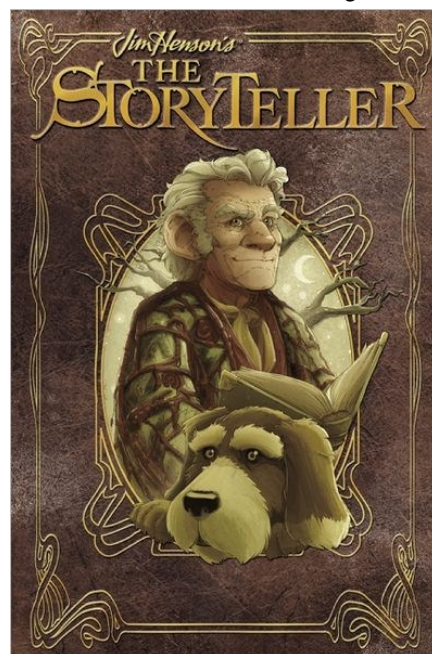
³ *Ibid.*

Nate Cosby, ed. *Jim Henson's "The StoryTeller"* (graphic novel). Archaia Entertainment, 2011. 112 pp., \$19.95 (hardcover). Reviewed by Harley J. Sims.

Almost twenty-four years have passed since the original series of Jim Henson's award-winning *StoryTeller* had its run on American and British television. It is doubtful whether anyone who watched even one of the nine priceless episodes could forget the image of a knobby-faced John Hurt seated before his fireplace, nor fail to recall the jeering and fretting of his talking dog (voiced by Brian Henson). In many ways, that series — as well as its four-episode successor, *The Greek Myths* — still epitomizes the best work of Jim Henson and The Jim Henson Company, bringing together storytelling that is traditional and heartwarmingly earnest, settings that are both bewitching and inviting, and, of course, puppetry that remains unrivaled in an age of special-effects wizardry. The death of Jim Henson in 1990 marked the loss of a profoundly independent vision of Fantasy, one that many children of the eighties felt — to their imaginations, at least — as a formative blow.

In the past decade, however, and with the reacquisition of The Jim Henson Company by Henson's children in 2003, many of Henson's old franchises are experiencing a happy resurgence. Among these are a projected series of

graphic novels by Archaia Entertainment of Los Angeles, the first of which was published in November 2011. *Jim Henson's "The StoryTeller"* is an anthology containing nine original stories, each one written and illustrated by different individuals or collaborations thereof. Most are established professionals in the comics industry, particularly among superhero titles. Among the contributors and their contributions are Roger Langridge and Jordie Bellaire ("Old Nick and the Peddler"), Colleen Coover ("The Milkmaid and Her Pail"), Chris Eliopoulos and Mike Miahack ("An Agreement Between Friends"), Jeff Parker and Tom Fowler



(“Old Fire Dragaman”), Marjorie Liu and Jennifer L. Meyer (“Puss in Boots”), Paul Tobin and Evan Shaner (“The Frog Who Became an Emperor”), Katie Cook (“The Crane Wife”), and Ron Marz and Craig Rousseau (“Momotaro the Peach Boy”). Perhaps the magnum of this opus, however, is “The Witch Baby,” which is based on an unproduced *StoryTeller* teleplay by Anthony Minghella, Susan Kodieck, and Anne Mountfield. Minghella, who died in 2008, wrote the teleplays for both *StoryTeller* series. Some may recall that he went on to win an Oscar for directing the film adaptation of Michael Ondaatje’s novel *The English Patient* in 1996. “The Witch Baby” is adapted for the graphic novel by Nate Cosby (the volume’s overall editor), Roman Cliquet, and Adam Street. Additional illustrations for the book are provided by Patrick Scherberger, Dennis Calero, Mitch Gerads, Janet K. Lee, and David Petersen.

Jim Henson’s “The StoryTeller” is a wholesome and heartwarming collection, one that stands out in a medium (and genre) somewhat proud of having forfeited these qualities. As with the *StoryTeller* television series, each of the nine stories is based explicitly on a traditional folktale (albeit some, like Liu and Meyer’s “Puss in Boots,” very loosely), and each has a moral to convey. Only once or twice does the reader feel cloyed by these messages, however; Coover’s “Milkmaid and Her Pail” delivers its punch in as innovative a way as can be expected from its basis in one of Aesop’s best-known fables. Tobin and Shaner’s “The Frog Who Became an Emperor” is reminiscent of the Emmy Award-winning first *StoryTeller* episode *Hans My Hedgehog*, particularly in its charming strangeness and unresolved combination of folktale motifs (which, unlike in *Hans My Hedgehog*, Tobin and Shaner employ self-consciously). All the stories have the zest of antiquity, though the opening tale, Langridge and Bellaire’s “Old Nick and the Peddler,” suffers from a few too many anachronistic allusions and wordings. The art in this piece is also, along with that of Eliopoulos and Maihack’s “An Agreement Between Friends,” the least impressive, which suggests it might have been moved deeper into the collec-

tion. Perhaps the most enchanting visuals of the collection are the work of Tom Fowler, who renders Parker’s “Old Fire Dragaman” (an Appalachian Jack tale) subtly in pencils, with fitting predominance of black, red, and gold. Cook’s “The Crane Wife,” retelling a Japanese folktale, is illustrated correspondingly in manga-style, though its sophistication and coloring allow what would otherwise seem a gimmick to succeed more as a tribute. Marz and Rousseau’s “Momotaro the Peach Boy,” another Japanese tale, employs chalky hues on colored paper to achieve a similarly traditional effect. Liu and Meyer’s “Puss in Boots” is, despite the almost ridiculous liberties it takes with its source in Charles Perrault, very charming. Meyer’s artwork for the piece is fluid and beautiful, and as the collection’s sole collaboration between a woman writer and a woman illustrator, “Puss in Boots” is also intriguing for its distinctive style.

The final tale of the collection, “The Witch Baby,” is based on reportedly one of three unproduced manuscripts Minghella originally wrote for *The StoryTeller* series. From a Russian folktale, it is twenty-two pages in length, almost double that of the second-longest story. Framed by the storyteller’s meditation on tarot cards, it follows a young prince from the empty excess of his parents’ court to his sanctuary at the Castle of the Sister of the Sun, and finally back again to confront the horrible prophecy that comes to punish his family and kingdom. It is a movingly surreal — though at times wrenchingly nightmarish — yarn, one that bears the unmistakable touch of *The StoryTeller*’s late, and legendary, writer.

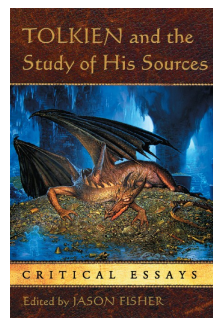
As a faithful continuation of one of the best-loved storytelling franchises, *Jim Henson’s “The StoryTeller”* is a worthwhile purchase both for fans of the television series and for new initiates. It is, furthermore, a handsome, respectable-looking volume, and stands apart from the typically flimsy binding and garish coloring of the standard graphic novel. One can only hope that the two other Minghella scripts find realization in additional volumes, not to mention that additional volumes occur. ≡

First-hand memories of Oxford's Inklings writer's group and the continued success of J.R.R. Tolkien 75 years after *The Hobbit* was published will be the subjects of two presentations in St. Louis in March.

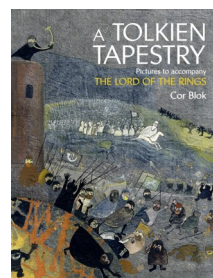
Colin Havard, the son of Dr. Robert E. Havard, will discuss C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and other members in "An Inklings Son Remembers" at 7PM on Tuesday, March 20. Mike Foster will serve as interlocutor. Then, Foster will examine the ongoing recognition of Tolkien's works in "Tolkien's Worldwide Popularity 1937-2012" at 6PM on Thursday, March 22.

Both events will be held in room SCEUC 213 at the South County Education and University Center, 4115 Meramec Bottom Road, St. Louis, 63129 (phone 314.984.7200). Sponsored by St. Louis Community College, both are free and open to the public.

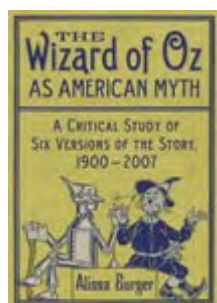
NEW AND FORTHCOMING BOOKS



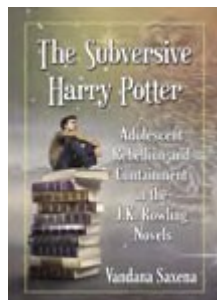
Jason Fisher, ed. *Tolkien and the Study of His Sources: Critical Essays*. McFarland, 240 pp. \$40 (softcover). ISBN 978-0786464821. July, 2011.



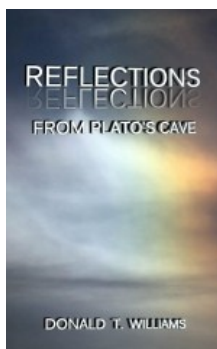
Cor Block. *A Tolkien Tapestry: Pictures to accompany The Lord of the Rings*. HarperCollins, 160 pp. £20 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0007437986. September, 2011.



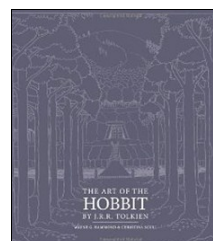
Alissa Burger. *The Wizard of Oz as American Myth: A Critical Study of Six Versions of the Story, 1900-2007*. McFarland, \$35 (softcover). ISBN 978-0786466436. July, 2012.



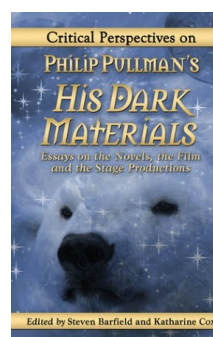
Vandana Saxena. *The Subversive Harry Potter: Adolescent Rebellion and Containment in the J.K. Rowling Novels*. McFarland, \$40 (softcover). ISBN 978-0786466740. July, 2012.



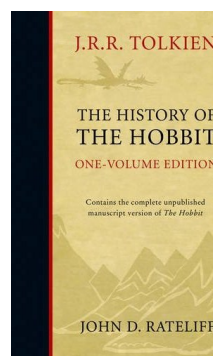
Donald T. Williams. *Reflections from Plato's Cave: Essays in Evangelical Philosophy*. Lantern Hollow Press, \$14.95 (softcover). ISBN 978-0615589107. January, 2012.



Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull. *The Art of The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien*. Harper-Collins. 128 pp. £25 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0007440818. October, 2011.



Steven Barfield and Katharine Cox, eds. *Critical Perspectives on Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials: Essays on the Novels, the Film and the Stage Productions*. McFarland. 288 pp. \$40 (softcover). ISBN 978-0786440306. September, 2011.



John D. Rateliff. *The History of the Hobbit* (newly revised, one-volume edition). HarperCollins. 960 pp. £35 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0007440825. October, 2011.

Discussion Groups

The Mythopoeic Society has members throughout the U.S. and in several foreign countries; the lucky ones are able to find other people interested in the Inklings, myth, and fantasy literature close enough geographically to meet on a regular basis. The Society sponsors Discussion Groups in several different states in the U.S., with a number of additional groups in the process of forming and active.

Once or twice a year, we list active groups here. Groups that wish to be listed in the active category should regularly update the Secretary with their meeting and discussion plans. Groups are also encouraged to share reports of their activities with the Secretary for inclusion in *Mythprint*.

Groups that wish to become active should contact the Secretary and inform her of their first meeting, topic, time, location and contact person. Groups that have not yet chosen to become Chartered, or those who are interested in creating a new Mythopoeic Society-sponsored discussion or special interest group, please complete our group charter form at www.mythsoc.org.

Marion VanLoo, Membership & Discussion Group Secretary

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

CALIFORNIA

[REDACTED] *Mydgard*

Lee Speth, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] *C.S. Lewis Society of California*

David J. Theroux, [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] *Khazad-dum*

Amy Wisniewski & Edith Crowe, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

COLORADO

[REDACTED] *Fanuidhol* ("Cloudy Head")

Patricia Yarrow, [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

[REDACTED] *Knossos*

Mimi Stevens, [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

HAWAII

[REDACTED] *Sammath Naur*

Steve Brown, [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

ILLINOIS

[REDACTED] *The Far Westfarthing*

Mike Foster, [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

IOWA

[REDACTED] *Alfheim*

Doug Rossman, [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

MINNESOTA

[REDACTED] *Rivendell*

David Lenander, [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

MISSOURI

[REDACTED] *Brethil: The Tolkien Adventure Community*

Dr. Paul D. Nygard, St. Louis Community College-Florissant

[REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

NEW MEXICO

[REDACTED] *The UNM Hobbit Society*

Leslie A. Donovan, [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

NEVADA

[REDACTED] *Crickhollow*

Joanne Burnett, [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

NEW YORK

New York: [REDACTED] *The Northeast Tolkien Society*

Anthony Burdge & Jessica Burke, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

OREGON

[REDACTED] *Bywater Inklings*

Gary Lundquist, [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

PENNSYLVANIA

[REDACTED] *Fantasy Studies Fellowship*

Lori Campbell, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

WASHINGTON

[REDACTED] *Mithlond*

John D Rateliff, [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

WISCONSIN

[REDACTED] *The Burrahobbits*

Jeffrey & Jan Long, [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

The Screwtape Letters, by C.S. Lewis, adapted and directed for the stage by Jeffrey Fiske and Max McLean, presented by Fellowship for the Performing Arts. Performance at Herbst Theatre, San Francisco Performing Arts Center, January 21, 2012. Reviewed by David Bratman.

This two-actor stage adaptation of *The Screwtape Letters* is produced by a Christian theater group and was brought to my attention by the C.S. Lewis Society of Northern California. It was first performed in New York in 2006, and is currently touring the U.S. Dates, locations, and ticket reservation links may be found at [REDACTED]

The text of the adaptation is based almost entirely strictly on Lewis's words. It condenses the book into a 90-minute show by selecting, and to an extent rearranging, key sentences out of the letters and from "Screwtape Proposes a Toast." The latter of these is presented as a prologue, delivered from a lectern. After this, Screwtape retires to his study, equipped with a comfy leather chair, to dictate his successive letters on the philosophy and practice of damnation addressed to the unfortunate junior tempter Wormwood.

This inherently undramatic scenario is rendered more theatrically palatable by the histrionics of the actors and a certain amount of stage distraction. The letters are sent, and those of the unseen Wormwood fetched back, via an industrial-revolution-style pneumatic tube, positioned high above the stage and pointed straight up. Assisted by the harsh lighting and sound, this makes a nice visual indication of how far down below our scene is located. It seemed to me that the condensation is coherent and conveys the intent of the book, but then I already know the book pretty well, so I could be mentally filling in gaps. (In a Q&A after the

show, the actors asked for a show of hands, finding that about a third of the audience had never finished the book and some ten per cent hadn't read it at all.)

Suave in a smoking jacket, Screwtape is played by the saturninely-bearded Max McLean (best known as an audio narrator of Christian books) in the vocal style of a slightly tipsy schoolmaster, with highly inflected mannerisms designed to punctuate the text and deliver the oomph behind Lewis's satire. This isn't a bureaucratic Screwtape, but a pedagogical one. He's more crafty than he is outright demonic — Screwtape's craving of Wormwood's soul is underplayed, a bit surprisingly in comparison to the rest — but he is less pedantic than John Cleese's audio tape of the book. I particularly enjoyed the way McLean has Screwtape speak his own name for the closing salutation of each letter: something like "Screue – taPe," with a spirally descending tone to the first syllable, an almost French "eu" sound to the first vowel, a tiny pause between the syllables, and a deliberately popped "P."

Though the moment when Screwtape transforms himself into a centipede is omitted, because the adapters couldn't figure out how to present it onstage, Screwtape's secretary Toadpipe (played in this performance by Beckley Andrews, one of three performers taking the part), who completes that letter for him, is pre-



sent in a form like unto a cross between Peter Jackson's Gollum in behavior and the Creature from the Black Lagoon in costume. She crouches on the floor to scribble on paper, climbs a ladder to send the letters up from hell and fetch Wormwood's in the pneumatic tube, gesticulates and makes various Andy Serkis-like cat-barfing noises in response to Screwtape's observations, and mimes assorted human characters as Screwtape describes them.

Lewis's text is deliberately timeless. Screwtape mentions a human war (obviously World War II, during which the book was written), but, as Lewis notes, the demon is only interested in it insofar as it affects the potential damnation of Wormwood's human "patient." The adapters couldn't help nudging the time period slightly when Screwtape describes the demonic plan to control sexual temptation in popular culture by throwing in visual and auditory references to the singer-actress Madonna, possibly no longer the most current example. To each his own, I guess.

Screwtape's voice, and Toadpipe's gurgles, are amplified, presumably with body mikes, and various amplified sound effects punctuate the production, particularly during Screwtape's paean to noise and cacophony. For a moment there it was a little too close to hell for me. ≡



"Exploring the Blind Spots: Snowblind Studios' *'The Lord of the Rings': War in the North.*"
Reviewed by Harley J. Sims

*Of the great War of the Ring, many songs
have been sung and many tales told. The
names of heroes like Gandalf the Grey,
Aragorn the King, and Frodo the Ring-bearer
are greatly revered. And rightly so ...
Yet Sauron's grasp stretched much further
than the lands of Gondor and Rohan alone,
and his forces might have done great evil in*

*the North of Middle-earth had a handful of
heroes not stood in his path. Their stories, too,
deserve to be told ...*

*Pay heed now to one such tale which begins
here, in the town of Bree, just a few short days
before Frodo arrived on his quest.*

So Gandalf commands in the introductory voice-over to *'The Lord of the Rings': War in the North*, moments before the player(s) are deposited before Aragorn inside the Prancing Pony. This is not, of course, the best imitation of Tolkien's writing; it seems unlikely that Gandalf would ever refer to himself or his companions as "heroes" (he uses the word "hero" only once¹, and — as with its three other appearances in *The Lord of the Rings* (pp. 515, 697, 880) — its use borders irony), nor likely would the wizard state that his name is "rightly so" to be "greatly revered." Nevertheless, one does not pick up a video-game controller with expectations of literary precision, nor to peruse on-screen text for any longer than necessary. One does so expecting an interactive, audio-visual experience — something that lends to the passive medium of film some of the active depth and explorative interface of the real world. With a game based in Middle-earth, the appeal is obvious. The question, as always with adaptations, is whether the experience is indeed worthy of its prestigious setting.

'The Lord of the Rings': War in the North is an action-RPG developed by Snowblind Studios of Seattle, Washington in association with Middle-earth Enterprises, and published by WB Games for the Playstation 3 and Xbox 360 consoles, as well as for PC. The game is also affiliated with TimeWarner's New Line Cinema, and is set in the world of the recent films. It has an ESRB Rating of Mature 17+ for the amount of gore, something relatively new among *Lord of the Rings* games, which are nevertheless all combat-heavy. *War in the North* was released in the UK on November 24, slightly earlier elsewhere.

Snowblind Studios is responsible for a number of well-known hack-and-slash fantasy titles over the last ten years, including *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* (set in the Dungeons and Dragons

setting, *Forgotten Realms*), as well as the generic *Champions of Norrath* and its sequel, *Champions: Return to Arms*. Veterans of any one of these titles will feel a profound sense of *déjà vu* even before the true action of *War in the North* begins. The systems and protocols involving conversation, equipment, inventory, and purchasing are almost identical to the studio's previous RPG titles, which, for their efficiency, is not to say they could easily have been improved. Level advancement and acquisition of skills are also similar, providing yet another example of where *LOTR* inspires *D&D* inspires adaptations of

rial. While around a dozen electronic games set in Middle-earth have been published for almost a dozen platforms since Peter Jackson's films began appearing (with most, but not all, being set in the world of the films), *War in the North* is the first one dedicated to peripheral areas, events, and characters. Choosing among three would-be heroes, players are sent north by Aragorn in order to investigate an attack on the Rangers' camp at Sarn Ford by nine black riders. They soon discover a campaign to conquer the North for Sauron's forces, one led by a towering black Númenórean who describes himself as the



LOTR. For the most part (and especially at the higher levels of difficulty), combat remains a button-mashing, potion-swallowing mayhem, especially when one is surrounded by Orcs and the other party members are in need of reviving. Ranged attacks that involve precise aiming, as well as customisable abilities, tend to break this monotony somewhat, but the game remains overwhelmingly combat-based. *War in the North* can be played shoulder-to-shoulder with two players (except on PC), and over online networks with up to three.

For Tolkien aficionados, the most interesting aspect of the game lies in its use of literary mate-

Dark Lord's "right hand." Before finally cornering the villain in his lair amidst the grisly ruins of Carn Dûm, players will visit Fornost, Sarn Ford, the Barrow Downs, Rivendell, the Ettenmoors, and Mount Gundabad, as well as ruins and a dragon's lair in the Grey Mountains, and an original Dwarvish kingdom called Nordinbad. Osgiliath and Lórien are also portrayed, though as 'challenge' areas for practising one's combat skills. During their journeys, players will encounter familiar, original, and never-before-portrayed characters. Most notable of the latter is Radagast, whom they must rescue in Mirkwood from the clutches of Saenathra, a clone of

Shelob. Likely the most memorable of the original characters, however, is Úrgost, the firedrake in the Grey Mountains, with whom characters must deal rather than duel (this is not the First Age, after all). That the wyrm bargains honourably — and that the player-characters chide him good-naturedly at the end of the game — will doubtless stick in the craws of most purists. In the Ettenmoors, there is also a ‘Stone-giant,’ a creature mentioned only (and possibly whimsically) in *The Hobbit*, and which *War in the North* has made to resemble the stone-based equivalent of an Ent.

The writers of *War in the North* appear to have made admirable use of literary and linguistic resources in developing original material. Allusions are plentiful; a journal of Malbeth can be found in Fornost, while references to Angmar are common. The Eagles play a role — Gwaihir himself appears — and the members of the Fellowship can be spoken with during the first visit to Rivendell. Though many new names are imperfect, most are transparent enough etymologically, or at least adhere to blind spots in Tolkien’s less-developed languages. The names of two of the three player-characters — the Dúndan Ranger Eradan and the Dwarf Champion Farin — have precedents in literature, which was certainly the safest option for the writers. The name of the third, the Elf Loremaster Andriel, is Sindarin for ‘great lady.’ The game’s villain is Agandaûr, whose name means ‘death-pale’ in Adûnaic (according to the Númenórean vocabularies in *Sauron Defeated*, however, the circumflex on *daûr* should have been on the *a*, thus *dâur*.² Úrgost, the name of the dragon, is likely an attempt at Quenya ‘heat/fire fortress.’ If so, it should probably have been **Úrosto*; the incorrect *gost* suffix was likely deduced from ‘Belegost,’ which is Sindarin *Beleg* ‘strong’ + *ost* ‘fortress’/‘city.’ There are several other examples of original names based on existing roots, with perhaps the most notable being Azan-zâram, apparently the name of the scenic subterranean lake within Nordinbad, and Khuzdul for ‘dark pool.’ The names of the Orcs and Dwarves — whose languages have very lim-

ited corpora — simply keep to established phonology.

While the amount of carnage in the game seems gratuitous for the franchise — players receive bonus experience for decapitating, as well as severing the limbs of, their opponents — the visuals of *War in the North* are breathtaking. Flowers bloom within the cracks of Fornost’s pavestones, seed fluff drifts through the air at Sarn Ford, and breaths cloud the air everywhere north of Rivendell. The sounds of the game are equally gripping; steel grinds through steel and flesh, and Orc-horns blare like wounded cattle. Flies drone in the abattoir of Gundabad, and crows erupt alarmingly from the thickets of Mirkwood. The voice-acting is superb, and the musical score coordinated to the on-screen action. Though there are many issues in terms of character ethics and technical gameplay — players must smash shrines on the Barrow Downs to find treasure, for example, while fellow player-characters, unlike enemies, cannot hurt each other with their attacks — *War in the North* is an electronic masterpiece, and by far the most majestic game yet developed for Middle-earth. Though there is not the space here to debate the rightful place of video games in Tolkien studies, it is enough for now to point out that while no commercial literary fiction set in Middle-earth has appeared that does not bear the authorship of J.R.R. Tolkien, games — whether electronic or tabletop — routinely involve characters, events, and narratives that establish new material. Whether or not those creations will ever be considered canonical, the monetary, intellectual, artistic, and technical resources behind such products deserve more comprehensive consideration than the gaming industry and the discipline of Game Studies together will grant them. *‘The Lord of the Rings’*: *War in the North* is a deserving candidate of this consideration, and Tolkien as well as pop culture studies would certainly benefit from more thorough analysis. ≡

¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 2nd ed (HarperCollins, 1965), 263

² J.R.R. Tolkien, *Sauron Defeated* (HarperCollins, 1992), 423

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