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Across the Brandywine

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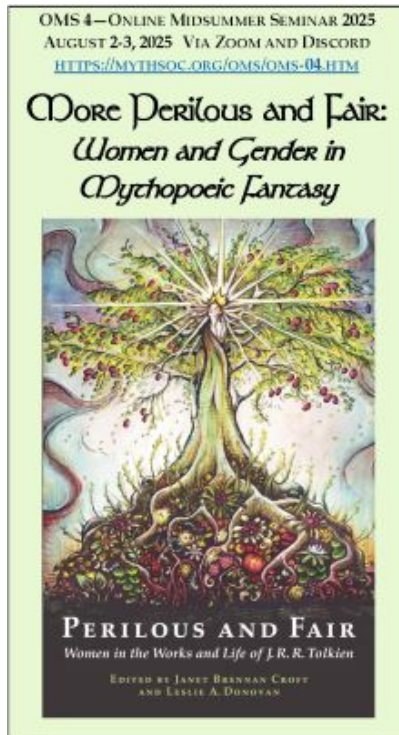
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Across the Brandywine

Abstract

An informal editorial column by Bernie Zuber to comment on subjects related to Mythlore.

Additional Keywords

Mythlore; Bernie Zuber; Brandywine

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Across the Brandywine

by Bernie Zuber

Since I had no specific articles to write for this issue I could've relaxed and let everyone else do the writing. Yet I still felt the urge to write something. I decided I would try an informal editorial column in which I could comment on subjects related to Mythlore, the Mythopoeic Society or anything else of possible interest. As I tried to think of a suitable name for this column, the phrase "across the Brandywine" occurred to me and drove all other titles out of my mind. When I read The Fellowship of the Ring the scene in which Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin cross the Brandywine River on a flat ferry-boat fascinated me. The foggy atmosphere, with the round windows of Brandy Hall shining from the opposite shore, created an aura of mystery; still there was a familiarity to this scene... perhaps a half-forgotten dream or a foggy night in real life. For over a year I had wanted to do the illustration that now accompanies this column. My symbolic interpretation of Across the Brandywine is this: for the hobbits, across the Brandywine lies the path to the world beyond the Shire... for us, across the Brandywine lies the path to the world of myths and fantasy.

This issue contains the first piece of fiction to appear in the pages of Mythlore. It's a brand new fairy tale by Mark Spradley. If you read Glen's explanation of policy in our first issue you might be wondering how fiction can relate to discussions of the mythopoeic writers. Well, the explanation also included general aspects of myth and fantasy and that's where this story fits in. It is not at odds with the type of fiction written by our three favorite authors. Glen asked me how I felt about publishing Mark's story and then proceeded to read it to me. At first, I felt that it progressed slowly and I wondered what it was all leading to, but by the time Glen read the confrontation between the witch and the young king I was really caught up in it. I was enjoying the clever dialogue, and already I could picture the illustration I eventually did for that scene. Mark is an 18-year old junior college student whose writing shows promise. I hope we'll be seeing more of his work in future issues of Mythlore.

Two of our contributing artists have already developed quite a following among Tolkien fans and in the larger world of science fiction fandom. I doubt most of our readers need an explanation of who they are... unless one were to write a complete article about them (which they deserve). I am referring, of course, to George Barr and Tim Kirk. Our third regular artist, however, is perhaps less well known. She is Bonnie Bergstrom, a 20-year old student of art and drama at San Fernando Valley College. I first saw her work on the cover of the ninth issue of The Tolkien Journal. I rather liked that drawing of the two hobbits, but when I first met Bonnie at the Mythopoeic Society I didn't immediately connect her with that cover. And yet I should've recognized the free flowing style which is typical of her work. She is very prolific and covers page after page with

sketches illustrating stories she has read or some she has created herself. When she paints she has a wild sense of color. In addition to regular paints, she uses fluorescent paints, food coloring and mercurochrome! One of the small paintings she gave me could best be described as "a scene in Hell with a sense of humor". In our first issue she portrayed Frodo and Sam. For this issue she has contributed a rather startling illustration of a scene from C. S. Lewis' That Hideous Strength. I hope the readers will share our enthusiasm for her work.

Recently I read Lord of Light by Roger Zelazny (Avon, 95¢). This novel was the Hugo award winner for 1967. For the benefit of readers who may not know about the Hugos, let me describe them briefly as the Pulitzer prizes or Oscars of the science fiction world. As far as I know these awards are definitely for science fiction, and not fantasy, but there are times when that boundary is not too clear. Such is the case, to a certain extent, with Lord of Light. To the average reader, this novel would seem to be almost a rewriting of Hindu mythology, and yet it is science fiction because the setting is supposed to be on another planet in the distant future. The main characters are men and women who are so technologically advanced that they have all the physical appearances and tremendous powers of the Hindu gods, but every now and then they relax to chat and smoke cigarettes. There is a lot of powerful machinery involved to back up the magic of the gods, so it is science fiction, and yet all the research Zelazny did into the Upanishads and Vedas takes us right back to mythology. Quite an unusual approach which may have helped this book win the Hugo! There is humor too, amidst all the colorful action. One ludicrous pun stopped me dead in my tracks in the middle of a perfectly serious scene. Watch for it! Lord of Light held my attention so much; I found it hard to put down.

I wish I could be as enthusiastic about The Last Unicorn by Peter S. Beagle (Ballantine, 95¢). Perhaps I had expected too much after hearing about it when I saw Beagle at the Tolkien Society meeting last year. I would like to read some reviews explaining the symbolic meanings of this novel because I'm not sure I caught them all. I have no quarrel with the plot, but it is the rather pretentious writing style that bothers me. Beagle, in my opinion, has a way of overusing similes and metaphors to such an extent that they become distracting. I felt that some of his descriptions were straining too much for effect. I was not impressed by Molly "answering past a sharpness in her throat" or by the fact that the three main characters first saw Haggard's castle "one owl-less autumn evening". For a fantasy such as this, a colorful and lyrical style is indeed appropriate, but I wish Peter S. Beagle had handled the descriptive passages as gracefully as Ray Bradbury. Other readers, of course, may differ with me. Finally, I will admit that certain scenes, such as the description of Haggard's castle, were inspiring for illustrations, and that is something I always appreciate in a book.

Our editor-and-publisher-who-rules-with-an-iron-hand told me to keep this column down to two pages. However, for those of you who haven't had enough of my writing at this point, I've written a fanzine review in another part of this issue.