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Patrick Wynne

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Paula DiSante

Sarah Beach

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"Feanor Fronts Fingolfin": Artistic Visions of Four Artists

"Fëanor Fronts Fingolfin"

Artistic Visions of Four Artists

Patrick Wynne, Tom Loback, Paula DiSante & Sarah Beach

As with last year's art project of "The Death of Glorfindel", this project was a challenge to the artists to produce independent renderings of an agreed subject. Until each artist had completed his or her own piece, none of them knew how any other had handled the assignment.

The passage chosen this time is from *The Silmarillion* (paper ed., p.75-76, hardcover ed., p.69-70).

Then there was great unrest in Tirion, and Finwe was troubled; and he summoned all his lords to council. But Fingolfin hastened to his halls and stood before him, saying: 'King and father, wilt thou not restrain the pride of our brother, Curufinwe, who is called the Spirit of Fire, all too truly? By what right does he speak for all our people, as if he were King? Thou it was who long ago spoke before the Quendi, bidding them accept the summons of the Valar to Aman. Thou it was that led the Noldor upon the long road through the perils of Middle-earth to the light of Eldamar. If thou dost not now repent of it, two sons at least thou hast to honour thy words.'

But even as Fingolfin spoke, Fëanor strode into the chamber, and he was fully armed: his high helm upon his head, and at his side a mighty sword. 'So it is, even as I guessed,' he said. 'My half-brother would be before me with my father, in this as in all other matters.' Then turning upon Fingolfin he drew his sword, crying: 'Get thee gone, and take thy due place!'

Fingolfin bowed before Finwe, and without word or glance to Fëanor he went from the chamber. But Fëanor followed him, and at the door of the king's house he stayed him; and the point of his bright sword he set against Fingolfin's breast. 'See, half-brother!' he said. 'This is sharper than thy tongue. Try but once more to usurp my place and the love of my father, and maybe it will rid the Noldor of one who seeks to be the master of thralls.'

These words were heard by many, for the house of Finwe was in the great square beneath the Mindon; but again Fingolfin made no answer, and passing through the throng in silence he went to seek Finarfin his brother.

You will discover by looking through the issue that each artist decided upon the same moment in this passage. The whole passage is quoted to provide the atmospheric background of that moment.

Patrick Wynne: "Sihe halpbruder, diss ist scherpfper dann dein zung." (Front Cover)

Sometimes Truth and Beauty fail to inspire me. At such moments I am not above resorting to Weirdness, and therein lies the origin of the cover drawing.

Tolkien presented his Middle-earth legends, not as works of fiction, but as translations of actual historical documents of immense antiquity. In *Note on the Shire Records* (I, 23) Tolkien wrote that "many copies were made" of the Red Book of Westmarch, which included *The Silmarillion* as part of Bilbo's 'Translations from the Elvish,' and carrying this charming literary conceit to its logical extreme it seems possible that long before Tolkien got around to putting the Red Book material into Modern English, earlier scholars in other lands may have produced their own translations and editions, based on whatever of the "many copies" had come into their possession.

Such extrapolation led me to the idea of rendering Fëanor's confrontation with Fingolfin in the style of a woodcut illustration from an imaginary 15th Century German translation of *The Silmarillion*. In mimicking this historical style I was inspired by German woodcuts in Ernst and Johanna Lehner's *Devils, Demons, Death and Damnation* (just the sort of wholesome tome you would expect me to have on hand), and this volume also provided me with my imaginary edition's printer, Peter Wagner of Nuremberg (I only noticed later that our initials are identical).

A common feature in old woodcuts is an inscribed banner indicating a line of spoken dialogue (the precursor of the modern-day cartoon speech balloon), and I wanted my pseudo-woodcut to have such a banner bearing Fëanor's threat, "See, half-brother! This is sharper than thy tongue." — in German, of course. Since my own knowledge of *Deutsch* doesn't extend much beyond *Gesundheit*, I sought the aid of my friend Arden Smith, currently a second-year graduate student in Germanic linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley. Not only was Arden able to supply me with Fëanor's line in German, he translated it into "an accurate pseudo-example of Early New High German, East Franconian dialect," appropriate to 1493 Nuremberg. He also provided me with historically authentic letter-forms and devised the German title of the edition (see the contents page).

Imitating a woodcut style in pen and ink was a tedious process, since virtually every individual line had to be carefully thickened to produce the proper effect. I was also forced to deviate from my own ideal vision of the scene in order to remain true to the artistic conventions of the historical period. So if the costumes look a little more Teutonic than Elvish, the poses seem somewhat clunky and mannered, and Galathilion looks more like the crabapple tree

in Grandma's backyard than the noble image of Telperion, don't come complaining to me — tell it to Peter Wagner.

Tom Loback: "Thus Spake Fëanor" (Page 17)

Yé ea ve inye intyane. Pertorninya mere soi esta nin, sinanen ve ilqainen. Etvanyo-tye ar envanyo mentyanna. Tíro, per-toron! Sina ná aika ala lambe-tya. Kose er lu atta mapa haryanya ar i meles atarinyo ar nai metyava Noldoron mine man mere ná mólaturo.

Thus spake Fëanor unto Fingolfin. While "aika ala lambe-tya", "sharper than thy tongue" (literally: sharp beyond tongue-thy) is the high dramatic moment of this scene from *The Silmarillion* and the natural choice for the illustration, the act of adding the calligraphic text colored the choice for the title of the piece. Since I wanted the text to be self-contained and pertinent to the drawing, I ended up excerpting only Tolkien's direct quotes of Fëanor. This manuscript page therefore places the viewer in the crowd outside the House of Finwe, with little narrative distance, to judge the event on his own. The attempt to back-translate the quotation into Quenya hopefully furthers the currency of this representation, despite the problematic syntax. "Recorded as it happened" might also be an operative description. Incidentally, the viewer may note the depiction of Fëanor's plate-armour. This is reasoned and deliberate as it is unequivocally stated that chain-mail is an invention of the Dwarves of Beleriand and therefore as yet unknown to the Elves of Valinor. I tried to characterize Fëanor with sharp, chiseled or faceted features, while Fingolfin would have an air of more physical strength and "heroic", noble character.

The more or less literal translation of the Quenya is: "Lo it is as even I guessed. Half-brother-mine wishes himself to precede me, this-thing-in as everything-in. Out-forth-thee and again-forth place-thy-to. See, half-brother! This is sharp beyond tongue-thy. Strive but a time again to seize place-mine and the love father-mine-of and maybe will end one Noldor-from who wishes to be thrall-master-of."

Paula DiSante: "See, Half-brother! This Is Sharper Than Thy Tongue" (Page 41)

I was interested in capturing the scene almost like it was a snapshot of this emotionally charged moment. The prideful Fëanor barely holds his rage in check, so I tried to show this by the clenched left hand, the furrowed brow, and the glowering face of the elf lord. The slight inward and downward curl of his posture conveys (I hope) a sense of threat and menace. The tall, plumed helmet is right out of the text, and serves to make Fëanor even more forbidding.

Fingolfin's body language is designed to indicate what is happening on his end. The puffed out chest, and thrown back shoulders and head suggest not only his surprise at this dangerous turn of events, but also a certain amount of his own pride. The position of Fingolfin's head was especially intentional, showing him startled but unafraid. He is

"looking down his nose," as it were, at his arrogant brother, while refusing to give any ground. My aim was also to depict Fingolfin prudent enough to keep his mouth shut, and avoid being skewered into Fëanorian shish kebab.

For the sake of compositional clarity, I opted for just a handful of bystanders to suggest that there were witnesses present. Tolkien describes a "throng" in the book, but I didn't feel like drawing a throng. The title of the Piece is a direct quote from Fëanor. Whenever possible, I choose a line of dialogue or description for titles of artwork. It makes me feel that I have illustrated the scene the way Tolkien wrote it (in *my* mind, at least!).

Sarah Beach: "Get Thee Gone!" (Back Cover)

Even though the title I chose for my piece is from an earlier moment than the one depicted, it caught the spirit of the moment for me. For a time, I was stalled by the problem of composition: how to pose the figures, how to show their faces. What I wanted was to show both Fëanor's and Fingolfin's expressions as Fëanor holds his sword at his half-brother's throat. Then I chanced upon a photograph which captured an ideal pose for Fëanor, and the rest fell in place easily.

Fëanor's fierceness is evident, as is Fingolfin's wary silence. Because I wanted to show Fëanor's tempestuous nature, I chucked his helmet, consigning it to the hands of one of his sons watching the scene. I also decided that Finwe would have been concerned enough to follow his sons out of the hall—not a pleasant scene for him.

Strangely enough, there was one further element in my picture that I hadn't "thought out" before, but which seemed perfectly reasonable to me when I recognized it: that is, that I set it at night. I was explaining to Paula how I had kept working to make my dark areas darker, and I said "After all, it was at night." She said, "Was it?" Whereupon we promptly checked the text, to find that there is no reference to the time of the occasion. "But," I said, "it seemed like night to me." And that was that.



ART SUBMISSIONS



Mythlore welcomes the submission of new artists to its pages. Both full page and column pieces are encouraged. Full page art should be 7.25" wide by 9.25" tall — it may actually be larger if it is in proportions. Column art should first be 5" wide by 6" to 8" tall, which can be photographically reduced to fit the printed size of the column. Material inspired by or illustrating the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, or Charles Williams is especially sought, but other mythological and fantasy inspired artwork is also welcome. Write directly to the Art Editor, whose address is found on page 2.