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Joint Artists' Project

Patrick Wynne

Paula DiSante

Sarah Beach

Lynn Maudlin

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Joint Artists' Project
Once again, a group of your friendly Mythopoeic Society artists present you with an interpretation of a scene from the work of J.R.R. Tolkien. This time around, the passage selected was that of Pippin’s using the palantir of Orthanc. The parameters the artists were given were from the point where Pippin lifts the stone from Gandalf to the end of Gandalf’s examination of the hobbit. Usually, we quote the passage for you, but you will appreciate that this time it is too long. We hope you enjoy the results (and we are interested in hearing your comments on our efforts — this time around, and in our previous experiments).

Pippin and The Palantir
by Patrick Wynne — Cover

The scene in which Pippin meddles in the affairs of wizards by gazing into the palantir is a wonderful exercise in suspense. However, translating that tension into visual terms was a problem, for the simple textual image of a horrified hobbit looking into a crystal ball seemed a little on the dull side, and I wanted my illustration to have lots of excitement and visual gee-whizery. My solution was to combine two scenes into one, not only showing Pippin looking into the Orthanc-stone but simultaneously showing — large and in living black and white — what he saw there, as described to Gandalf some ten paragraphs later:

‘I saw a dark sky, and tall battlements,’ he said. ‘And tiny stars. It seemed very far away and long ago, yet hard and clear. Then the stars went in and out — they were cut off by things with wings. Very big, I think, really; but in the glass they looked like bats wheeling round the tower. I thought there were nine of them...’

My “neo-medieval” style seemed the best choice for this illustration. I attempted to maintain throughout a somewhat precarious balance between abstraction and fidelity to reality. The sleeping figures of Gandalf and Merry, for example, (inspired by a 12th-century mosaic of sleeping disciples in the church of San Marco in Venice) are plausible-enough representations of those characters as described in the text; yet the symmetry of their poses and placement in identical triangular sections on either side of Pippin makes them serve as decorative motifs as well.

Barad-dûr is shown as if viewed from far below, so that it looms threateningly over the helpless hobbit. The eye of Sauron with its flames streaming from a high window are not mentioned in the text of this scene, but their inclusion is a bit of artistic license taken from Frodo’s view of the Dark Tower in III:219-20:

... and then he saw, rising black, blacker and darker than the vast shades amid which it stood, the cruel pinnacles and iron crown of the topmost tower of Barad-dûr. One moment only it stared out, but as from some great window immeasurable high there stabbed northward a flame of red, the flicker of a piercing Eye...

Another case of artistic license is the starry sky. The text refers to a “dark sky”, but I could not use solid black since there would then be no contrast with the Dark Tower and the Nazgûl, which are also rendered in black. So the “dark sky” with “tiny stars” has been reduced to a lighter pattern of op-art spirals which add to the looming effect by receding into the distance along the lines of perspective in precisely the same way real stars don’t. We are, after all, dealing with a nightmare vision viewed through a magical seeing-stone.

The rather impertinent werewolf-heads decorating the upper corners are based on the “beak-head” motifs which are a common feature of Anglo-Norman architecture (the “beaks” are often actually lolling tongues). Such designs can be found carved over the doors of St. Peter’s-in-the-East in Oxford, so if you will be attending the Centenary Conference there in August, perhaps you would care to join me on a hunting expedition for impertinent Anglo-Norman beasties...

“What Mischief Has He Done — To Himself, And To All Of Us?”
by Paula DiSante — Back Cover

‘So this is the thief!’ said Gandalf. Hastily he cast his cloak over the globe where it lay. ‘But you, Pippin! This is a grievous turn to things!’ He knelt by Pippin’s body: the hobbit was lying on his back, rigid, with unseeing eyes staring up at the sky. The devilry! What mischief has he done — to himself, and to all of us?’ The wizard’s face was drawn and haggard.

When I began tossing around ideas for this piece, I thought: “Oh, great, a night scene lit by the moon! Help!” In truth, this is a fun and challenging scene for an illustrator because there are plenty of ways to interpret it. But because of some intense personal stresses at the time I was producing this piece, I wasn’t much in the mood to deal with character psychology. I was having a heck of a time just dealing with my own. So, instead, I decided to make this a straightforward exercise in composition.

Gandalf and Pippin were easy enough. But once these two figures were placed onto the paper, I found myself facing a big blank spot on the right-hand side. I knew when I started the drawing that something had to go here, but for a long time I couldn’t make up my mind as to who or what that should be. I finally settled on Aragorn — or at least half of Aragorn — to balance the rightside. Pippin’s outflung arm was leading my eye off the page, so I used the natural curve of his fingers as a “pointer” to direct the viewer’s gaze to the blade of the sword.

The intention was to have the eye follow up the blade and, at the pommel of the sword, continue on to Merry’s face. The angle of Merry’s own sword then leads the eye back to
Gandalf, the sweep of whose arms leads back to Pippin, whose arm leads back to the sword, and son on and so forth. All of these aforementioned elements create a large diamond shape. In fact, I made it a point to build in a series of underlying diamonds into several other parts of the composition. The basic form of Gandalf himself is one. The cloak-shrouded Palantir is the bottom of another diamond, the top of which is the wizard’s left hand, and the side points of which are the crook of Pippin’s arm and Pippin’s face.

I’m holding my breath on the ultimate reproduction of this piece. My cover from the last Mythlore was a shock to me because many of my nicely modulated grey tones went nearly black in the reproduction, and a great deal of detail was lost. A frantic call to the printer helped me to understand why this happened (unfortunately too late to save the look of that piece). I now know how to avoid some of the more problematic shortcomings of the printing process (at least with this technique. Pencil is another story.). But I didn’t learn about them until after this current drawing was completed. I’m praying that some of the background elements here can be rescued from a similar fate. Although I’ve got one mondo moonbeam lighting this scene, let’s hope it proves to be enough!

Pippin and The Palantir
by Sarah Beach — page 35

The tension in this scene has always appealed to me, and I’ve long wanted to do an illustration of it. So when we were settling on the scene this time, I jumped at this suggestion. However, I have to confess that I’m not totally satisfied with the execution of my idea.

I wanted to convey a sense of Pippin’s being totally caught in gazing into the ball. But when I started doing my sketches, I found that I would have to sacrifice either the body language I wanted (completely hunched over the Palantir, almost as if he were about to fall into it), or I’d have to give up showing Pippin’s facial expression. I decided in favor of the body language.

I also wanted to show the tower in the ball. Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to achieve as much detail as I would have liked, for the dimensions of this picture are smaller than the usual size I work in.

And then there is the impossibly large moon rising over the dell. Well, without some sort of light, all there’d be would be darkness, and a vague sort of glow from the Palantir. I left a bit of that idea in the suggestion of light being cast up on Pippin’s face. I left the other figures out because (1) the size I was working at, more figures would have been too complicated, and (2) I decided to focus on Pippin’s isolation in his (evidently) telepathic adventure.

He Came and Questioned Me
by Lynn Maudlin — page 54

You may have noticed mine is a rather “free” interpretation of Pippin and the Palantir, accurate enough in regard to the horrified hobbit and Gandalf, aghast, rushing to break the spell, — yes, those are Ents trucking down the hillsides — why do you ask? — the tower Orthanc looming large in the background, its presence oppressive even at some distance, — well, you are right, of course, Pippin may not have seen that particular great eye — the wispy, vaporous clouds beginning to break up, carried away by a quickening breeze, perhaps that of economic freedom blowing in from the distant sea — “economic freedom”? No, surely I didn’t say “economic freedom,” why, that has nothing to do with The Two Towers, I wouldn’t have said that — well yes, I might have thought it, I suppose it could have said that — well, yes, I might have thought it, I suppose it could have been some subconscious projection of evil on my part — uh, yes, I was audited recently, how ever did you know?

Actually, when first approached about participating in this “group draw,” I wondered what I might bring to the subject matter that Wynne or DiSante or Beach couldn’t do as well or better (other than the Ainu Lyndale, safe in the Secret Maudlin Archives, far away in Fosston, Minnesota). Then it struck me — my occasionally irreverent sense of humor. I thought about frightening contemporary images which the Palantir might display and first imagined the face of Tammy Faye Baker, weeping, mascara-running, and I thought that was pretty horrifying. But she doesn’t have quite the staying power or ongoing dread of April 15th; the certainty of death and taxes... The viewer might be tempted, this being an election year, to see the drawing as a political statement, but believe me, if I’d intended a political message I would have inserted the words, “Read my lips!” in a balloon emanating from the tower... (or perhaps “I am not a crook!”).

Donation of Items to the Auction Sought

Yes, there is going to be an Auction at this year’s Conference in Oxford, and whether or not you are going personally, you are asked to please donate items to support the raising of funds for the Mythopoeic Society.

Note: many of the people attending will be coming from Europe. The items that will probably attract the most attention will be Tolkien related materials: books, publications, calendars, memorabilia, etc., that are scarce and have been next to impossible to find in Europe — these will most likely be items produced items solely in America (e.g. the Ballantine Tolkien Calendars, amateur publications, etc.) Please check your collection (or boxes in the garage).

If you are going, your luggage will probably be packed to overflowing — why not send your auction items ahead (allow up to 3 months for transit by surface mail). Act now. Send your auction material to 1992 Mythopoeic Society Auction, in care of Pat and Trevor Reynolds, 16 Gibson Green, Heelands, Milton Keynes, England MK13 7NH.