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The Lord of the Rings Tarot Deck and Guide by Casey Gilly and Tomas Hijo

Abstract

Review of

The Lord of the Rings Tarot Deck and Guide. Casey Gilly (author) and Tomás Hijo (artist). San Rafael, CA: Insight Editions, 2022. 78-card deck and folded guide sheet. \$27.99. ISBN 978-1- 64722-809-5.

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THE LORD OF THE RINGS TAROT DECK AND GUIDE. Casey Gilly (author) and Tomás Hijo (artist). San Rafael, CA: Insight Editions, 2022. 78-card deck and folded guide sheet. \$27.99. ISBN 978-1-64722-809-5.

SIDON AND SCHUSTER'S INSIGHT EDITIONS is one of several publishers to add Tarot to their catalog in recent years: their website currently includes no less than twenty Tarot and oracle decks, all of them connected with popular literature, film, and television. Among the latest of these is Casey Gilly (author) and Tomás Hijo's (artist) *The Lord of the Rings Tarot Deck and Guide* (2022).

Hijo is a professor of illustration at the University of Salamanca in Spain (2010–2022) with many professional credits, including a Best Artwork Award from the Tolkien Society (2015) and prop designer for the film *Nightmare Alley* (2021) directed by Guillermo del Toro. *Nightmare Alley* was first adapted into a film directed by Edmund Goulding in 1947, soon after the release of the original novel by William Lindsay Gresham (1946). This novel is well known for its incorporation of Tarot, so it is not surprising that Gresham also wrote the text for the illustrated Preface in the 1962 Noonday printing of Inkleing Charles Williams's Tarot novel *The Greater Trumps* (1932). (Further details about both Tarot and Williams's novel can be found in Nancy-Lou Patterson's *Divining Tarot: Papers on Charles Williams's The Greater Trumps and Other Works*, 2019).

Hijo has created two other decks with Insight, including *Tarot del Toro: A Tarot Deck and Guidebook Inspired by the World of Guillermo del Toro* (2020) and the *Labyrinth Tarot Deck and Guide Book* (2021) based on Jim Henson's film *Labyrinth* (2010). All three of these decks are characterized by his signature linocut style (see the artist's website < <http://tomashijoart.bigcartel.com/> >) which is visually akin to early playing cards, including Tarot, that were printed from carved wood blocks. Something of the woodcut effect can be seen in the Marseilles-style Tarot illustrations included in Williams's *The Greater Trumps* (Noonday 1962). These illustrations and *The Greater Trumps* narrative demonstrate the penchant many artists and authors have for reorganizing the trumps: Gresham comments on Williams's revised trump order in his Preface. Hijo's reorganization of *The Lord of the Rings Tarot Deck* trumps is far more

modest than Williams's. He follows the precedent set by the creators of the *Rider-Waite-Smith* deck (1909), Arthur E. Waite and Pamela Colman Smith, by switching the order of two of the trumps found in older Marseilles-style decks so that trump VIII is Strength and trump XI is Justice.

Hijo, unlike Smith, does not illustrate the pips: in this his deck again conforms to the Marseilles Tarot precedent. Like many artists who have re-envisioned Tarot by merging it with another text, he adjusts the suits to express the narrative or visual overlay. Here, the familiar Wands, Cups, and Swords are retained, but the fourth suit of Coins or Pentacles becomes Rings, suggesting the rings of power in Tolkien's books. Where some artists also adjust or enlarge on the trump labels, Hijo retains those common (with variations) to the majority of modern versions of both Marseilles- and *Rider-Waite-Smith*-based decks: The Fool, The Magician, The High Priestess, and so forth. Unlike many such decks, however, his trumps are not numbered. In addition, many of the trump and court card Tolkien-associations would be uncertain if not completely unrecognizable without Gilly's guide.

Gilly's author credits include, besides a number of books, the guides for several decks published by Insight Editions including *The DC Tarot Deck and Guidebook* (2022) and *The Stranger Things Tarot Deck* (2022), as well as the forty-four-card *Magic of Marvel Oracle Deck* (2022). The text for *The Lord of the Rings Tarot Deck* guide provides a tidy clarification of the intended connections between the trumps and court cards and various Tolkien-derived characters, locations, and objects, so it is unfortunate that the publisher opted to replace the usual little white book with a large, unwieldy fold-out sheet that can't even be used as a poster because the information runs across both front and back.

Hijo and Gilly's *The Lord of the Rings Tarot* invites comparison with *The Lord of the Rings Tarot Card Game* created by Terry Donaldson (author), Peter Pracownik (artist), and Mike Fitzgerald (game rules) and published by U.S. Games (1997), as well as *The Hobbit Tarot* also created by Donaldson and Pracownik and published by U.S. Games (2012). Both of these decks are rendered in a more painterly and narrative style than Hijo's. Pracownik's guidebooks for both the 1997 and 2012 decks detail the associations between all cards and Tolkien's books and the *Lord of the Rings* cards include not only the classic labels along the left margin, but also descriptive sentences at the bottom that clarify the meaning of the card by its relation to Tolkien's story. In spite of a very few noteworthy extras, such as the authentic-looking runes on the Ace of Swords, Hijo and Gilly clearly favored labels and generalities over detailed references to their sources: they provide little, if any, rationale at all for their card-to-character assignments.

Given the variance in approaches to the connections between Tarot and Tolkien's text, it isn't surprising that different cards are aligned with different

characters in these two *Lord of the Rings* decks. Gilly and Hijo make Frodo the Fool, while Donaldson and Pracownik represent Gollum as the Fool. Gilly and Hijo identify Galadriel with the High Priestess; Donaldson and Pracownik associate the card with Éowyn because she “is guided by her intuition.” The Empress is Arwen and the Wheel of Fortune is the Shire in the more recent deck; these cards are Belladonna Took and the Ring in the earlier one. The only card that is the same in both decks is the Magician, who is presented as Gandalf. Since Donaldson and Pracownik illustrate all of the cards, they are able to include characters more than once in different situations without redundancy. In spite of the fewer illustrations overall, Gilly and Hijo sometimes represent the same character on more than one card. For example, Galadriel is not only the High Priestess, she is also the Queen of Cups. Arwen is both the Empress and the Queen of Wands. Aragorn is both Emperor and King of Cups.

Overall, Donaldson and Pracownik made a very close study of Tolkien’s work so that they could offer a deck that can be used for readings in which the querent’s questions and experiences are granted a distinctive alignment with a text they presumably identify deeply with. Gilly and Hijo are certainly accomplished professionals, but their deck does not indicate any particular familiarity with their source texts. Some Tarot-readers may find the sparseness of obvious *Lord of the Rings* referents in the cards more conducive to general use and even prefer the woodcut-like rendering, larger cards, and particular quality of the card stock, but Tolkien fans are likely to pencil in (and perhaps change a few of) the character names to avoid having to cover their spread with the fold-out guide.

—Emily E. Auger



THE MAP OF WILDERLAND: ECOCRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON TOLKIEN’S MYTH OF WILDERNESS. Amber Lehning. Kent OH: The Kent State University Press, 2022. 269 p. ISBN 978-1-60635-442-1. \$55.00.

IN THIS AMBITIOUS WORK, AUTHOR AMBER LEHNING brings together two concepts central to J.R.R. Tolkien’s worldview and corpus—myth and the natural world. Drawing on ecocritical perspectives, comparative mythological approaches, and source criticism of key texts—both Tolkien’s own and also others that impacted the creation of Middle-earth—Lehning’s *The Map of Wilderland* maintains that Tolkien’s legendarium and its stories can be adopted to help counter harmful narratives that have led to ecological destruction and catastrophe in the primary world. Contemporary global policy and society, Lehning argues, operate according to devastating, outdated myths of the