

EDGE OF THE WILD

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FROM THE EDITOR:

The Elves' New Year and the time of budding leaves has come and gone, and ushered in a glorious Summer ripe for adventuring! In this issue, we have endeavored to explore topics that may help inspire those of you who may wish to create an Elvish living-history persona! (As none of our current membership portray such a being, it has been a bit of a challenge for us to gather up a newsletter's worth of material!) In this issue, we offer up (among other topics) a selection of 'occupations' which could be applied to an Elvish impression, share some fascinating revelations on the Elves' most well-known export, and unpack what it takes to truly capture the 'Elvish look'.

We hope you will enjoy, and thank you for reading!

-A. hollis

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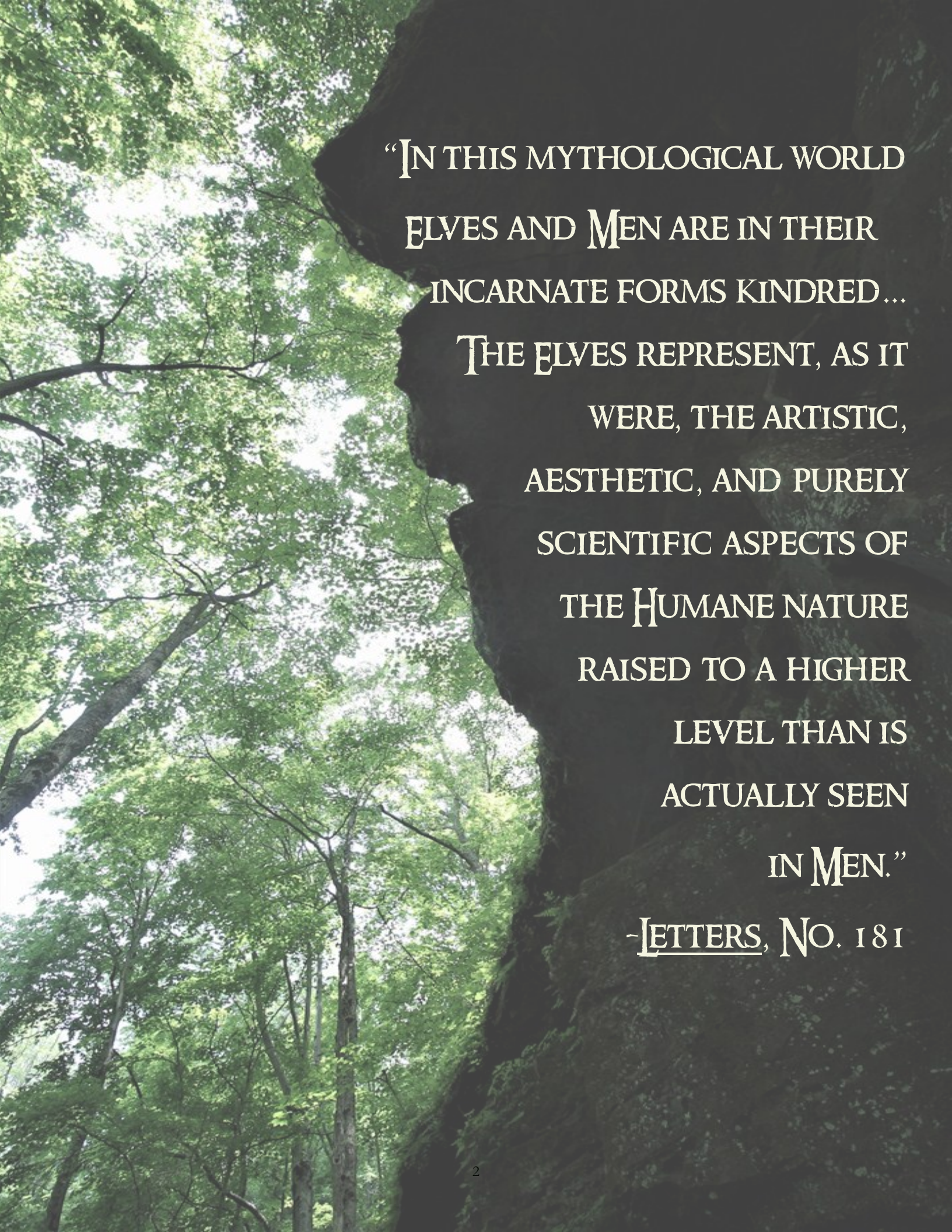
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“IN THIS MYTHOLOGICAL WORLD
ELVES AND MEN ARE IN THEIR
INCARNATE FORMS KINDRED...
THE ELVES REPRESENT, AS IT
WERE, THE ARTISTIC,
AESTHETIC, AND PURELY
SCIENTIFIC ASPECTS OF
THE HUMANE NATURE
RAISED TO A HIGHER
LEVEL THAN IS
ACTUALLY SEEN
IN MEN.”

-LETTERS, NO. 181

PICK A PERSONA: ELVES

a. hollis

We will now cross the final racial divide and examine possible common personas for the Firstborn of Middle-earth, the Elves. While some of their skills may seem to cross the line into ‘magic’ to those they meet (i.e. Hobbits), some are still within the realm of possibility for we mortals to demonstrate or interpret.

-Whether of the Grey Havens, Lothlórien, or Edhellhond, one craft practiced by Elves since the First Age is that of **Boatwright**, often incorporating bird-forms, but also using simpler designs such as the boats given to the Fellowship for river-travel (1). In fact, Tolkien writes in a note that “All Elves were naturally skilled in making boats” (2)!

As these craft are often described as being propelled by muscle power, it is logical that there must also have been Elvish **Woodworkers** responsible for carving items such as the “short-handled paddles” with “broad leaf-shaped blades”, the box given to Sam by Galadriel (3), or the “richly carved” ceiling beams of Rivendell (4).

-Many gems and jewelry of great beauty are attributed to Elvish **Jewelers**, such as the green Elfstone given to Aragorn, the golden belt given to Boromir, or the *mallorn*-brooches given to the Fellowship (5). The designing and making of such treasures would be wonderful to explore through interpretation (see *In Search of the Elven-Brooch* on page 12).

-One *intoxicating* possibility would be that of an Elvish **Brewer**, **Vintner**, or **Distiller**, responsible for making the *miruvor* cordial of Rivendell (itself possibly a kind of mead, and possibly the same as the “fragrant draught” shared with the Hobbits by Gildor) or the heady wine of Dor-

winion exported to northern Mirkwood (6). And once decanted, one would need a fine **Leatherworker** to create the leather flasks and bottles that are used to contain such drinks (7).

-For those with a mind for the textile arts, researching and practicing the exquisite crafts of **Weaver** and **Roper** in a Lothlórien context could be quite interesting. While it may have been overshadowed by the more prominent *lem-bas*, the mysterious Elvish material *bitblain* still intrigues us. One wonders if or how its unique properties of softness and strength could be replicated.

-Another craft apparently practiced by the Elves of Rivendell and Lórien is that of **Tanner**: note that Haldir’s lookouts are described as using furs and fur-cloaks to keep warm in the treetops (8), and it is specifically Elrond who supplies the departing Fellowship with fur-lined cloaks and jackets (9). In addition, the Elves of northern Mirkwood are known to have hunted for their feasts, and presumably would have not let the hides of their quarries go to waste, so it follows that their kingdom included tanners as well. (10)

-As we discuss in detail later in this issue (see page 7), the famous waybread of the Elves, *lem-bas*, would be wonderful to interpret through a persona, as long as you keep in mind the unique restrictions placed on its production and distribution! (11)

-Finally, there is perhaps no greater store of past knowledge in Middle-earth than that of Elrond in Rivendell. Such would be an excellent fit for a **Lore-master**, **Archivist**, or **Scholar**—what we might call an *Elvish Librarian*!—or even

Illuminator of manuscripts. If you have an interest in the Elvish modes of writing or calligraphy, you may want to consider this as an excellent ‘indoor persona’ to practice during the long, cold months of Winter!



Are there any Elvish trades which we should have included here? [Join the conversation online and let us know!](#)

References

- (1) Lord of the Rings Book II: Chapter 8; Adventures of Tom Bombadil #16; The History of Middle-earth, Volume XII: Chapter XIII, note 29.

- (2) *The Rivers and Beacon-hills of Gondor*
 (3) LR II:8
 (4) LR II:1
 (5) LR II:8
 (6) LR II:3, I:3, The Hobbit Ch 9
 (7) LR I:12, II:3; TH 9
 (8) LR II:6
 (9) LR II:3
 (10) TH 8
 (11) HoME Vol XII: Ch XV, *On Lembas*

Review: 3 RIVERS BODKIN POINTS

Available from 3riversarchery.com, these glue-on short Bodkins are a great answer to our need for target points that look the part as well as a legitimate maille-defeating point for the wanderer. Online, they have an aged appearance, but in person they come as a very uniform pitch black; still, that’s nothing that some light hand sanding can’t remedy. These points come bored to fit the common 11/32” diameter shaft with a five-degree taper...identical to standard modern field points, for an easy conversion. They also weigh in at 125 grains, the most common point weight, to help us avoid sacrificing functionality for form while afield. At \$13.50 per three points, this is an inexpensive and easy way to take your impression from “hiding a few modern issues” to immersive and impressive, almost regardless of what culture you’re pursuing within Middle-earth.



“Axes of the ELves! The ELves are Upon you!”

G. LAMMERS

Though it might be hard to believe, **axes**—so iconic and identified with Dwarvish culture—were indeed associated with some groups of Tolkien’s Elves. Truly, such a tool could be associated with all of the Elves and cultures of all races across Middle-earth, as no one in their right mind would go about cutting timber for building and crafting with any other tool, but for discussion’s sake we are going to stick with talking about the axe’s martial applications.

In the First Age the Elves were divided among several kindreds (1), each of which had a certain proclivity for a particular trade. The Teleri were shipbuilders and seafarers; it was they who were slaughtered in such large numbers at Aqualondë by the Noldor (2)...but they had kindred who had chosen to stay in Middle-earth during the great journey from the East where the Elves first awoke. It was these Teleri, who eventually became known as the Sindar, or later Grey Elves, with whom we have known associations with Axes.

It is notable that Thingol Greymantle, greatest of the Sindar and father of Luthien, had his armory stocked with axes and with spears and swords”—*in that order*, suggesting that the axe was for his people the most important (3).

A young Tuor son of Huor was raised among these very Elves “...until Tuor was sixteen years of age and was become strong and able to wield arms, the axe and bow of the Grey-elves...” (4). This is not a tool given to him by the Elves to fit his own stature...this is written as the Elves raising him to fight *their way*.

Tuor eventually leaves these Elves and heads

for the western shores, where he eventually meets Ulmo and sets out on his search for Gondolin. We read in the actual fall of the great city that Tuor maintains his habit of bearing an axe rather than the swords typical of those in Gondolin. As we learn much later in The Hobbit, Turgon, King of Gondolin, carries Glamdring, which could be assumed to be a barometer to measure the rest of the city against: the Gondolindrim were a sword-wielding people. At this point, no further traces of axes specifically used in wartime and connected to the Elves exist, but it is easy to trace where the knowledge and use *could* have gone. A clear descent from Tuor down the line of Men to Númenor is easy to trace (lending credence to the conjectural Gondorian Boarding Axe featured in *Edge of the Wild* 3:1), but where did these Grey Elves end up in later Ages?

Many of the Sindar joined with the remaining Noldor in forming new communities after the destruction of Beleriand. One such was Oropher of Doriath, who founded the woodland realm in what would later become Mirkwood. After his demise (5), his son Thranduil took the throne and ruled into the Fourth Age (6). Mirkwood’s forces at the Battle of Five Armies are described as wielding spear, sword, and bow (7), but it stands to reason that the “axe and bow” of the First Age Sindar would be functional and perhaps more appropriate for the wood-dwelling people of northern Mirkwood than these. Perhaps their depiction would have been one of those altered by Tolkien had the 1960 *Hobbit* been completed, but unfortunately, of this we shall never know. ✨

Notes and References:

- (1) The Silmarillion: *Quenta Silmarillion*:
Chapter 3 - Of the Coming of the Elves and
the Captivity of Melkor.
- (2) The Silmarillion: *Quenta Silmarillion*:
Chapter 9 - Of the Flight of the Noldor
- (3) The Silmarillion: *Quenta Silmarillion*:
Chapter 10 - Of the Sindar
- (4) The Fall of Gondolin: *Of Tuor and His Com-
ing to Gondolin*
- (5) Unfinished Tales, Part Two, Chapter 4: The
History of Galadriel and Celeborn, Appendix
B: The Sindarin Princes of the Silvan Elves
- (6) The Lord of the Rings, Appendix B: The
Tale of Years
- (7) The Hobbit, Chapter 17: The Clouds Burst:
*"Their spears and swords shone in the gloom with a
gleam of chill flame, so deadly was the wrath of the
hands that held them. As soon as the host of their ene-
mies was dense in the valley, they sent against it a show-
er of arrows, and each flickered as it fled as if with
stinging fire. Behind the arrows a thousand of their
spearmen leapt down and charged."*
Perhaps even more intriguing in this depiction
is the possibility that Thranduil's folk retained
the Gondolindrim's ability to create glowing
weapons like Sting, Glamdring, or Orcrist!

At right, we see Ms. Pauline Baynes' depiction of the Ringbearers preparing to leave Rivendell at the close of the Third Age. Galadriel is astride her grey palfrey in the foreground. (from *Bilbo's Last Song*, plate 4)

Out of Edoras: Elvish Horses

E. MEULEMANS

The only Elvish equines described by Tolkien are Arwen and Galadriel's palfreys, and Glorfindel's horse Asfaloth. We know they are grey and white, and no more, but we might consider that they ride Arabians or Barbs, which would tie in neatly with Legolas's instant affinity with Arod (1). The Baroque breeds, such as the Lipizzan and Andalusian are another option, though perhaps the delicate build and sensitive character of the Arab is better suited to Elves than the powerful physique and intellect of the Lipizzan. On this point, however, I am probably biased. ✨

(1) LR III:2: "Legolas asked them to take off saddle and rein. 'I need them not,' he said, and leaped lightly up, and to their wonder Arod was tame and willing beneath him, moving here and there with but a spoken word: such was the elvish way with all good beasts."



CONCERNING LEMBAS

G. LAMMERS

If creating an Elvish persona, known things such as *lembas*, the mythical bread of the Eldar, will likely come to mind. Due to its import and thorough examination on the topic, the following passage from The Peoples of Middle-earth is presented **in its entirety**:

“This food the Eldar alone knew how to make. It was made for the comfort of those who had need to go upon a long journey in the wild, or of the hurt whose life was in peril. Only these were permitted to use it. The Eldar did not give it to Men, save only to a few whom they loved, if they were in great need.* The Eldar say that they first received this food from the Valar in the beginning of their days in the Great Journey. For it was made of a kind of corn which Yavanna brought forth in the fields of Aman, and some she sent to them by the hand of Orome for their succour upon the long march.

(*This was not done out of greed or jealousy, although at no time in Middle-earth was there great store of this food; but because the Eldar had been commanded to keep this gift in their own power, and not to make it common to the dwellers in mortal lands. For it is said that, if mortals eat often of this bread, they become weary of their mortality, desiring to abide among the Elves, and longing for the fields of Aman, to which they cannot come.)

Since it came from Yavanna, the queen, or the highest among the elven-women of any people, great or small, had the keeping and gift of the *lembas*, for which reason she was called *massanie* or *besain*: the Lady, or breadgiver. Now this corn had in it the strong life of Aman, which it could

impart to those who had the need and right to use the bread. If it was sown at any season, save in frost, it soon sprouted and grew swiftly, though it did not thrive in the shadow of plants of Middle-earth and would not endure winds that came out of the North while Morgoth dwelt there. Else it needed only a little sunlight to ripen; for it took swiftly and multiplied all the vigour of any light that fell on it. The Eldar grew it in guarded lands and sunlit glades; and they gathered its great golden ears, each one, by hand, and set no blade of metal to it. The white haulm was drawn from the earth in like manner, and woven into corn-leep for the storing of the grain: no worm or gnawing beast would touch that gleaming straw, and rot and mould and other evils of Middle-earth did not assail it.

From the ear to the wafer none were permitted to handle this grain, save those elven-women who were called Yavannildi (or by the Sindar the Ivonwin), the maidens of Yavanna; and the art of the making of the *lembas*, which they learned of the Valar, was a secret among them, and so ever has remained.' *Lembas* is the Sindarin name, and comes from the older form *lenn-mbass* 'journey-bread'. In Quenya it was most often named *Coimas* which is 'life-bread'.” The History of Middle-earth, Vol 12: The Peoples of Middle-earth: Ch 15—Of *Lembas*

It is important to examine this passage carefully, regardless of what culture your impression pursues, because while it describes fairly clearly what went into the life-giving wafers, it also quite clearly states how restricted their use was, and how rare *lembas* truly was. For starters, no non-Elves should have access to it. We have record of but **one** exceedingly rare instance in which a group of mostly non-Elves both en-

tered and exited Lothlórien unscathed, and were only given *lembas* under the most extreme of needs.

For Elves, the use is far more common, yet somehow not common. An Elvish persona should have a significant reason for carrying *lembas* as outlined above, and in the pursuit of our ‘common persona’ ideal, these reasons aren’t to be sought out as a rule, but rather on occasion when the opportunity presents itself.

All other cultures should avoid referring to their trail bread as *lembas*, but rather a lesser waybread of varying value as would be expected of less skilled bakers attempting to imitate the rumored wafers of the Eldar.



Below, we have Ms. Pauline Baynes’ interpretation of the Elves of northern Mirkwood, a group who are infrequently depicted by Tolkien illustrators. The garb of Thranduill’s folk are only described twice, and both times they are clad in “green and brown” (TH 8; LR II:2). Ms. Baynes makes the fascinating choice of clothing her woodland elves in coats of overlapping leaf-like scales, sometimes paired with cloaks. Not only would such leafy garments provide excellent camouflage in Mirkwood (effectively disrupting the wearer’s silhouette) but the pairing might also be both insulating and weather-repellent (acting much like a wearable thatched roof)!

(from *Bilbo’s Last Song*, vignette number 16)



SOME NOTES ON THE APPEARANCE OF ELVES

A. HOLLIS

As an author, Tolkien was well-aware of his “sketchiness” in describing specific details of his characters (admitting as much in Letters Nos. 154 and 211), which can be frustrating for those of us who seek to replicate or reconstruct his world as accurately as possible. Similarly, he rarely depicted human figures in his artwork, focusing instead on landscapes (which were often stylized).

Therefore we find we often have to do more than a little digging and reading between the lines to tease out details that flesh out his world.

I. Height

“...we encourage our members and interested parties to pursue portraying peoples which closely fit their own personal capabilities....if you are seven feet tall, portraying a Dwarf would be quite a stretch.” (MERS 2017 Standards 4:b:i)

While we do not wish to exclude interested parties from interpreting Elvish culture, for maximum verisimilitude we would suggest that those who wish to do so have the physical characteristics to do so convincingly, chiefly a strong and slender build, though height is a bonus.

After all, individuals of the Firstborn are the tallest of all the Free Peoples—Turgon was said to be “tallest of all the Children of the World, save Thingol” (1, 2). While we are never given specifics on Thingol’s height, we know that he must have been taller than Elendil the Tall of Númenor, who was—depending on the source, either 7’ or 7’ 11” (3, 4). Galadriel was reckoned tall as well, and was stated to be ‘man-high’ or 6’4” (5).

II. No need for razors!

In one of his final writings on Middle-earth, Tolkien explained the cause of Legolas’s recognition of the ‘elven-blood’ in Prince Imrahil of Dol Amroth (6). He writes that “it was a characteristic of all Elves to be beardless” and so would be an “observable” trait of Men “who were so descended” (7).

This means that—contrary to certain popular depictions—not only Elves, but also prominent Men such as Aragorn, Boromir, and Faramir, would also appear clean-shaven, due to their mixed Elvish/Númenorean heritage!

Tolkien’s statement would seem to conflict with the beard of Cirdan the Shipwright (8), although in an archival note, he wrote that Elves in their final (third) “cycle of life” *could* in fact grow beards, and Feanor’s father-in-law grew one early in his second cycle (9).

III. To point or not to point

One long-running debate among scholars of Middle-earth deals with whether or not Elves’ ears are ‘pointy’. To avoid boring the reader, I will say that there is evidence for both cases, which can be summarized as follows.

Arguments for pointed ears

In early linguistic notes on Quenya, a note states “The Quendian ears were more pointed and leaf shaped than [?human]” (10). In later notes he wrote that the Quenya *lasse*/Sindarin *las* ‘leaf’ “is thus possibly related to LAS ‘listen’, and S-LAS stem of Elvish words for ‘ear’” (11). Additionally, in his notes on illustrating The Hobbit, he explains that hobbits’ ears are “only

slightly **pointed and 'elvish'™** (12).

Arguments for non-pointed ears

The main evidence given for Elves having rounded ears is that oftentimes in his stories, certain Men are believed to be Elves when first encountered; in Unfinished Tales an Elf recognizes Tuor as a Man not due to his ears, but because of the nature of his eyes. This suggests that given two similar specimens, the differences between the two races might not be immediately obvious to an observer. Tolkien actually writes, "...there was less difference between the two Kindreds, Elves and Men, in early youth; and a man who watched elf-children at play might well have believed that they were the children of Men..." (13).

Unfortunately, no definitive answer to the Ear Question can be made with the texts we have available to us currently; perhaps some long-buried note will someday come to light.

However, if an interpreter wishes to portray one of the Firstborn *with* pointed ears, two simple, temporary, and *prosthetic-free* methods do exist!

Method one: using transparent adhesive tape, the tip of the ear may be lightly squeezed together to form an Elf-like point. The degree of the effect and final shape will be determined by the ear's starting form, plus how tightly and at what angle it is taped. Start with a short piece of tape, around 2"/5cm, and apply it to the back of the top of the ear. Squeezing the top of the ear together, wrap the tape around and be sure to secure it to itself, so it isn't relying on adhesion to your skin to stay in place. It may take several attempts to get the look you desire. Fully transparent tape should be used, otherwise the tape will be visible, although it can still reflect some glare as in the left photo below. A very minimal application of cosmetic founda-

tion or concealer will dampen the glossiness of the tape and eliminate this problem.

A second alternative method, as seen below at right, is to apply a drop or two of cyanoacrylate ('super glue') gel to the upper ear and pinch the two sides together. By doing so an 'elvish' ear appearance can be easily accomplished. Although the glue may break down and release on its own in a day or two, if a faster return to normalcy is desired, a drop of acetone (nail polish remover) will do so handily.



Taped ear method



Glued ear method

Addendum:

While we are on the subject of modifying one's outward appearance to portray one of Tolkien's races, it may be worth taking the time to state MERS' position on prosthetic devices for races such as dwarves, elves, and hobbits.

It should be noted that nowhere does Tolkien state that hobbits have oversized feet. This is a popular misconception begun (we believe) with the proportion-challenged art of the Brothers Hildebrand in the 1970s and encouraged by Peter Jackson's WETA design team and perpetuated by LOTRO developers. Therefore, it is not necessary in the context of high-authenticity 'living hobbitry' to wear Rubber Hobbit Feet. The authenticity gained through a thoroughly researched and constructed kit and adopted

persona is more than enough to make prosthetic devices unnecessary. Adding a 'foot toupee' to the tops of one's feet could be permissible, so long as it does not interfere with one's ability to travel safely while on the trail.

Likewise, as shown earlier, a pointed 'elvish' ear look can be created through means besides the wearing of plastic 'Spock' ears; and if you subscribe to the 'normal ear' theory, such a look is unnecessary in the first place! Those who seek to portray a dwarvish persona certainly need not encumber themselves with an artificial beard-wig. If you cannot grow a beard, make the rest of your persona and kit as complete and authentic as possible. Or perhaps you should consider if a dwarven persona is right for you. Such artificial beards rarely look convincing, and on the trail are impractical at best and dangerous at worst.



References:

- (1) Unfinished Tales: I: Ch 1 *Of Tuor and his coming to Gondolin*, note 31
- (2) The Silmarillion: Chapter 5 *Of Eldamar and the Princes of the Eldalië*
- (3) "Elendil and his son Isildur, both of whom had been seven feet tall" [Tolkien Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford; Published in Hammond & Scull's Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion: 229.
- (4) UT: III Ch 1 – *The Disaster of the Gladden Fields*; Appendix: Númenorean Linear Measures
- (5) *ibid.*
- (6) LR V:4
- (7) UT – II: Ch 4 – *The History of Galadriel and Celeborn*
- (8) LR VI:9
- (9) From the Shibboleth of Feanor, published in *Vinyar Tengwar* 41.

- (10) History of Middle-earth Vol 5, III The Etymologies
- (11) *Words, Phrases and Passages* published in *Parma Eldalamberon* 17
- (12) Letters, No. 27
- (13) HoME Vol 10, Part 3: *Laws and Customs Among the Eldar*



"The Sword of Elendil was forged anew by Elvish smiths, and on its blade was traced a device of seven stars set between the crescent Moon and the rayed Sun, and about them was written many runes..."

Lord of the Rings, Book II: Chapter 3

In Search of the ELVEN-BROOCH

a. hollis

Love them or hate them, I think most can agree that for nearly two(!) decades, the Peter Jackson/WETA vision of Middle-earth has been the dominant interpretation in the popular imagination. While many of his choices align nicely with Tolkien's scanty descriptions, there is one 'artifact' in particular which completely deviates from the text. I refer in this case to the elven-brooches of Lothlórien.

Despite what Messrs. Jackson and Taylor would have us believe, the leaves of a *mallorn* tree did NOT resemble a species of the genus *Hedera* (ivy). Actually, in a departure from his usual "sketchiness" (1), Tolkien's various descriptions quite plainly spell out what such a leaf or brooch *should* look like:

"Its bark was silver and smooth, and its boughs somewhat upswept *after the manner of the beech*; but it never grew save with a single trunk. *Its leaves, like those of the beech but greater*, were pale green above and beneath were silver glistening in the sun; in the autumn they did not fall, but turned to pale gold..." (2)

"Each cloak was fastened about the neck with a brooch like a green leaf veined with silver." (3)

"[Aragorn] held up a thing that glittered in the sunlight. *It looked like the new-opened leaf of a beech tree*, fair and strange in that treeless plain. "The brooch of an elven-cloak!" cried Legolas and Gimli together." (4)

Additionally, we can infer from Tolkien's descriptions that the brooches must be purely cosmetic, and play no functional role in keeping the Elven-cloaks in place. Note that even after Pippin "unclasps" his brooch, he retains his cloak, as he still wears it later in the chapter and so is unseen by a rider of Rohan: he and Merry lie "covered in *their* elven-cloaks" (5).



References

- (1) Letters, No. 154, 211
- (2) Unfinished Tales II:1—A Description of the Isle of Númenor
- (3) LR II:8
- (4) LR III:2
- (5) LR III:3

With the above pieces of evidence in mind, it is surprising that thus far no enterprising craftsman has produced a functional and accurate elf-brooch!

Perhaps such an item might function similarly to the mallorn-inspired hairpiece at left, made by the author.



ABOUT US

The Middle-earth Reenactment Society is dedicated to the furthering of J.R.R. Tolkien cultural studies, within the framework of 'historical' reenactment.

We exist to recreate the cultures of Middle-earth in both form and function, and to mold ourselves into peoples fitting to associate with and live as members of these fully-realized cultures.

A part of the middleearthbrangers.org Tolkien re-creation community, the Society publishes the online periodical Edge of the Wild, showcasing new research, methods, materials, and instructional articles, while meeting throughout the year at various sites deemed 'wild' enough to still capture the reality and imagination of the wild lands envisioned within the pages of Tolkien's works.

To subscribe to the newsletter and receive future issues of Edge of the Wild sent directly to your inbox, contact us at Middleearthreenactmentsociety@gmail.com or find us on Facebook as '[Middle-earth Reenactment Society](#)'.

To apply for membership, please send a head-to-toe portrait photo and a detailed description!

SOCIETY NEWS

Three of our core membership (plus a trusty hound) gathered in early April to explore new areas of an old haunt. Despite inclement weather, two nights were spent quite comfortably in a primitive manner, and great fellowship was had by all.

