

Correspondence continues, lively and controversial - I am grateful for the hospitality of the columns of the 'MALLORN' for some of it. Those of you who have written will note that many of the letters are dated some way back in the year - I'm sorry, but time passes so quickly!

HAL BROOME (Mithrandir) of the Istari smial, Hattiesburg, Miss., U.S.A. writes: "We are starting with 5 members, with two more prospects who may join later. We meet Thursday nights every week! (He also comments on the Donald Swan songs) "I read an inquiry in 'B.Broadsheet' asking what to do at smial meetings. I suggest a pet project of mine. 'Go ye minstrels, follow the footsteps of Donald Swan and compose music to the poems of Middle Earth!' I have been working on the music to 'Over the Misty Mountains Cold' in the Hobbit. My fellow smial members think it's pretty good, but I'm not yet satisfied with it." - Good work, Mithrandir. We should like to have your efforts some time, also perhaps the script of your local play, 'The Hobbit'.

DAVE WELDRAKE, of 9 South View Terrace, Hill Head, Halifax Road, Dewsbury, Yorks., writes: "If I were to suggest somewhere as part of MiddleEarth, I'd say that the Yorkshire Wolds were the remains of the Shire - and very much flourishing they are too." (Regarding Dwarves, he thinks there are no Dwarves left in our islands for the following dramatic reason:) "The only dwarvish race to dwell in our isles was wiped out years ago. They were the Picts, that courageous people who so harried the Romans, but in the end a Scottish king did what the Romans could not do and destroyed them all. He wanted the secret of Heather Ale, an ancient brew perhaps even older than Middle Earth. Only the Picts knew the secret so the king waged war on them.

"After the battle, the last two Picts, father and son, were brought before him. 'Tell me' said the king 'the secret of Heather Ale and I will set you free. If not I will cast you over the cliffs.' The boy shuddered at the thought but before he could speak his father motioned the king aside and said in a low whisper, 'Sire, I would gladly reveal the secret, however, I fear that my son would kill me if I did, for he is a rash impetuous youth and cares little for his father... But if you were to throw him over the cliff, it would then be safe for me to tell you the secret of Heather Ale...'

"The king needed no further prompting and the youth was unceremoniously thrown over the cliff-top and onto the rocks below. 'Now' said the king 'reveal the secret at once!'

" 'Never!' said the little man, and a smile crossed his lips. 'My son would have done so, had you given him the chance, for he was young and the world still had much to offer him, but I am old and neither torture nor reward means anything to me any more. Do as you will but the secret lives and dies with me.' Then the king realised he had been outwitted, and that, though he had won the battle, he was not the victor. In reality the victory belonged to the little old man, the last of the Picts. 'Let him go!' said the king sadly to his troops, and the old man ran off and disappeared into the hills, never to be seen again, and with him went the secret of Heather Ale.

"So this is the story of the last of the dwarvish race in Britain. Perhaps a few individuals survived, or perhaps there were other dwarvish tribes who came to our shores after this time but I think not, but then that gives you all the more reason to speak of them in your magazine. They were a noble race and their part in our culture and that of Middle Earth should not be forgotten lest we provoke the anger of their kin overseas, for dwarvish wrath will not be stilled.

Thank you for the fine story, Dave. I hope we haven't quite lost the dwarves, though. Some of the Cornish miners are very like them, and I have met some small-claim gold prospectors in South Africa (living in neat beehive huts intricately covered with) who were very dwarvish; and there are the Kobbolds,

Knockers, ect., ect., and as to the German Kellergeist, he sounds like the offspring of a Dwarf and a Wood-elf! But that raises the question of female Dwarves —

PHILIP HOWARD, of 22 Eyton Road, Dawley, Telford, Salop, writes: "No doubt there were notable Dwarf-women, but it would be difficult to get to know them - for one thing, you would never know if the dwarf was a woman. We are told that the two sexes were so alike that the 'eyes and ears of other peoples cannot tell them apart.' This is all very well - but what about the beards? Do Dwarf-women have beards as well?

Yes, as I read it, the Dwarf-women did have beards. Unattractive, but there's no accounting for Dwarves! They don't seem to have been a very sexy lot, do they? But I suppose male Dwarves found them congenial. I wonder what Dan, the mother of Fili and Kili looked like?

ROSIE TURNER (Rosie Cotton) of 6 Masefield Gardens, East Ham, London, E.6. Writes: "I wonder if anybody else who owns a paperback LotR has had the same trouble as I have! I picked up my well thumbed copy, and the middle pages promptly fell out. I stuck them back (with the aid of the sellotape) and all seemed well. I picked it up a few weeks later, and the complete cover fell off, and pages were wildly flying about the room. I've now had to put them in order, (all 1082 pages of it) stamp holes in it, and mount it in 2 'Ring Binders'! This means, of course, that I cannot possibly lend it to anybody now, and will have to buy myself a new copy (NOT in one paperback!) I think it was a rather a silly idea of Allen and Unwin's, to mount such a large story in one paperback, as it cannot possibly stand up to frequent handling (my copy was only three months old!)

Yes, I feel this must be brought to the notice of Allen & Unwins. The paperbacks of the separate parts (as published by Ballantyne, the only American edition authorised by JRRT himself) are much handier, and are really pocket size.

JAMES EAD of 29 Uttoxeter Road, Little Stoke, near Stone, Staffs, writes: "Have you heard any music by a folk group by the name of 'Magna Carter'? On their latest album called 'Seasons' is a very Tolkien influenced song called 'Ring of Stone', which appears to be the ruined tower on Weathertop. (I haven't, as I don't usually listen to pop music, but this sounds so promising that I will give it a fair hearing as soon as possible. He continues:)

"The other day, looking through an old file in which I keep bits of poetry I write, I discovered one which I had forgotten that I had written. It has no title and it seems now that a couple of the lines have come from LotR though not deliberately so.

I saw them, lying deep
Grim faces and evil,
Noble faces and sad,
Many faces proud and fair,
With weeds entwined
In their silver hair.
Deep, deep they lie,
Beneath the shadow in the sky.
Long have they lain
Since that fell day.
And a thousand leaves
Have fallen since then
In the lost land of Lorien,
That lies below the Sundering Sea.

Long have they lain, and deep
From that day, when the vigil kept
The weary men of war awake.
Spears and swords shone bright.
There were cries of battle
In the fading light.

But the passing years have flown since then
And gone are the Fair to the West at last.