



**Architects of Arda:**  
**The Design of the Elvish Realms in *The Rings of Power***

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the BA (Honours) Degree in Design for Film – Production Design

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## **Declaration of Originality**

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) Design for Film. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.



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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the production design of the Elvish realms in *The Rings of Power*, focusing on how design contributes to the show's worldbuilding and how influences from past concept artists and Tolkien's texts have shaped this new world. Through a close examination of four Elvish locations: Valinor, Lindon, Eregion, and Rivendell, I explore how each place reflects key aspects of Mark J.P. Wolf's worldbuilding theories, from subcreation and invention completeness to cultural reflections and immersion. These chapters explain how production design transforms Tolkien's written world into a visual experience, blending real-world history and mythology with modern design choices.

A significant part of this research involves looking at the historical sources and concept art that have influenced the design of these spaces. By examining artists like Alan Lee, John Howe, and Ted Nasmith, as well as newer artists like Roberto F. Castro and the production designers of *The Rings of Power*, I analyse how these images were adapted and reimagined for contemporary audiences.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that the production design of *The Rings of Power* builds on an established visual language, and does it really well, while introducing something new, offering another way for audiences to connect with Tolkien's world.

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# Introduction

One of the key points I am exploring in this thesis is not about deciding whether *The Rings of Power* is good or bad, but more about how you can create a new world inspired by an already existing one. I differentiated between the primary and secondary worlds, exploring them as if they were history, similar to Peter Jackson's approach in his films. He told his art department that everything should feel real, so they should pretend it was. (The Making of 'The Lord of the Rings', 2002)

Tolkien's work means a lot to me, as it does to many others. His world and his words have pulled me through dark times before and will again in the future. These stories feel like something that will always have the power to teach, help, or inspire. As Mark Wolf puts it,

Someone can read Tolkien's works in grade school, high school, college, and later; and with each re-reading, the reader will notice new things, make new connections, and reimagine events and characters due to the reader's own changed level of maturity and experience. (Wolf, 2013 p. 208).

Just like life keeps evolving and changing, so does how we experience Tolkien's work, including *The Rings of Power*.

In this introduction, I will summarize some of the key things I will discuss: *The Rings of Power* as a TV show, what worldbuilding is, and some background about the show's production design.

*The Rings of Power*, created by Amazon, released their second season in 2024. The story explores the events of the Second Age of Middle earth, including the forging of the Rings of Power, the rise of Sauron, and the early struggles of Elves, Dwarves, and Men that shape the World of *The Lord of the Rings*. The series' creators only have the license for the appendices of *The Lord of the Rings*, which restricts their adaptation to certain parts of Tolkien's work. (Deadline Hollywood, 2023)

However, I draw from *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales* to find visual clues and historical information that deepen the understanding of the Visual Language seen on screen. Some aspects of *The Rings of Power* are not entirely accurate to Tolkien's World, as certain events, characters, and timelines have been altered or reimagined for the adaptation. Despite these deviations, the series introduces new characters, lands, and cities long gone by the time of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, immersing viewers in familiar and fresh visuals. It is the most expensive TV show ever made, and it shows how much detail and money went into the costumes, sets, characters, and World. (Dockterman, 2022)

Tolkien wrote about four separate ages. The First Age covers the creation of Arda, where Elves battle Morgoth and much of the land changes. This is described in *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales*. The Second Age is briefly summarized in the last Chapter, "Rings of Power" in *The Silmarillion* and explored more fully in Appendices A and B of *The Lord of the Rings*, which are the sources from which the TV show *The Rings of Power* draws. The Third Age is the setting for *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, where we have the most detailed information about Tolkien's World. The Fourth Age follows the Elves' Departure to Valinor and the rise of Men, which are also told in the Appendixes.

## **Worldbuilding**

Worldbuilding is creating a fictional world with its own rules, geography, cultures and history to make a story feel authentic and immersive. J.R.R. Tolkien created his stories with multifaceted characters that are not always just good or bad (Shippey, 1996, p. 9). Incredibly detailed descriptions of nature include several pages describing a tree, the languages he invented, creatures like talking animals and several different races that each have their own culture and history. (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019)

*The Silmarillion* is an example of this, being less popular than *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Hobbit*, primarily because its stylistic approach is different, resembling the Bible in its cosmogony (Wood, 2025). It was intended by Tolkien to be a written history of Arda and was completed by his son, Christopher Tolkien after his death. Tolkien's influence on fantasy writing cannot be understated. However, Jackson's six Tolkien film adaptations have inspired a wave of work demonstrating how critical worldbuilding and creative choices can enhance a narrative in visual media, such as film. When you think of the shire or an elf, your mind mostly goes to what was shown in Jackson's movies.

### **Production Design of Rings of Power**

The production designer, Ramsey Avery, of Season One of *The Rings of Power*, talked about world-building in an interview. He talks about finding the DNA of Middle Earth and differentiating from the third age in decay to the second age, looking glorious, and working off what people already have in their imagination from previous movies but also mixing in a lot of old illustrations from Tolkien. The Production Team also focused on where each race comes from; "You can look back into that history. The Elves first appeared when there was not even the Sun or Moon—there were just stars in the sky—and they appeared in a forest. They lived in that forest for a time unmeasured, really. The idea is that their sense of the World is based on stars, trees, and nature, and everything springs from that." (Ramsey in Jones, 2023)

A big part of my thesis will be looking into the concept artists of the past and the present. Three of the most important ones are Alan Lee, Ted Nasmith and John Howe, who have worked on some of the *Lord of the Rings* adaptations but also have done much artwork inspired by Tolkien, which then was printed in special editions (as the illustrated version of *The Silmarillion* I quote from).

In the production of *Rings of Power*, John Howe contributed to the continuation of This World.

These Topics will be examined in each Chapter ranging from familiar Rivendell to an entirely new Lindon, focusing on various parts of Wolfs Theories in each Chapter.

## **Chapter One:**

### **Valinor and Subcreation**

This Chapter will explore Valinor, a significant location in the early history of Arda and the creation of this World and its inhabitants. It is the first location we encounter in Amazon's *The Rings of Power*, making it an ideal starting point for this thesis. I will look at its historical significance in Tolkien's texts and how it has presented visually in the first two episodes. I will also connect these to Mark Wolf's theories on Subcreation to show how Tolkien's worldbuilding works.

#### **Valinor as the starting point**

Situated in the far West beyond Middle-earth, the Land of Valinor has a rich history that is essential to Tolkien's works. Unlike Middle Earth, which most people know, Valinor is far away in distant lands. As explained in the *Silmarillion*, it was created during the first age as a safe place for elves and Valars (godlike beings) from the being Melkor (later called Morgoth), the antagonist in the first age. "The main body of the tale, the *Silmarillion*, is about the fall of the most gifted kindred of the Elves, their exile from Valinor (a kind of Paradise, the home of the Gods) in the furthest West," (Tolkien and Tolkien, 1999, p.15). Elves were allowed to live there safely until they migrated back to Middle Earth.

Many Elves like Galadriel grew up in Valinor. So, it is essential to consider it as the start of where some of the elves grew up and their first years of experience were formed. Tolkien described it as a blissful, eternal paradise where the Elves get to live with their gods.

And Valinor became more beautiful even than Middle-earth in the Spring of Arda; and it was blessed, for the Deathless dwelt there, and there naught faded nor withered, neither was there any stain upon flower or leaf in that land, nor any corruption or sickness in anything that lived; for the very stones and waters were hallowed (Tolkien and Tolkien, 1999, p. 47)

By the Second and Third Ages, Valinor became off-limits to everyone but the Elves, with rare exceptions. For instance, in *The Return of the King*, Frodo, Bilbo, Sam, and even Gimli are given special permission to sail to Valinor and live out their days (Tolkien, 2009, p.1348). The only way to reach Valinor is through the Grey Havens, a seaport in Lindon that will be explored further in Chapter Two.

### **Valinor in The Rings of Power**



Figure 1 *The Swan Ships* (*The Rings of Power*, 2022)

*The Rings of Power* gives us our first on-screen depiction of Valinor. The series opens with a young Galadriel in Valinor, crafting a paper boat shaped like a swan (see Figure 1). Swans are an important bird for the Valar, as the central City of Valinor is called Alqualondë, which translates to Swanhaven; it is also rooted in stories from the first age. Not only are swans in many different mythologies, such as Greek mythology, but they are also a symbol of beauty, elegance and perfection. They are the royal bird in England, as the British crown owns every swan on the British Isles. Tolkien used them as the symbol for the elves, as they are often described as: "Elves, fairest and wisest of all people." (The One Wiki to Rule Them All, n.d.)

Tolkien described these ships as "like swans with eyes and beaks of jet and gold. Beneath the arch of sea-carved stone that is gate of Alqualondë, the Teleri set sail

their swan ships, sing fair songs, and listen to the murmuring sea on the shore."  
(Tolkien and Tolkien, 1999, p. 80)

Towards the end of Episode One of *Rings of Power*, we see Galadriel on the ship in the shape of a Swan, bringing her towards Valinor back from Middle Earth (see Figure 2). So, we start and finish the episode of Valinor with a swan.



Figure 2 The Elves on the way to Valinor (*The Rings of Power*, 2022)

This is an example of how thought-out every detail in Tolkien's world is, with a symbol like a swan representing continuity and how *The Rings of Power* tries to implement these seemingly small but beautiful details.



## The City of Alqualondë

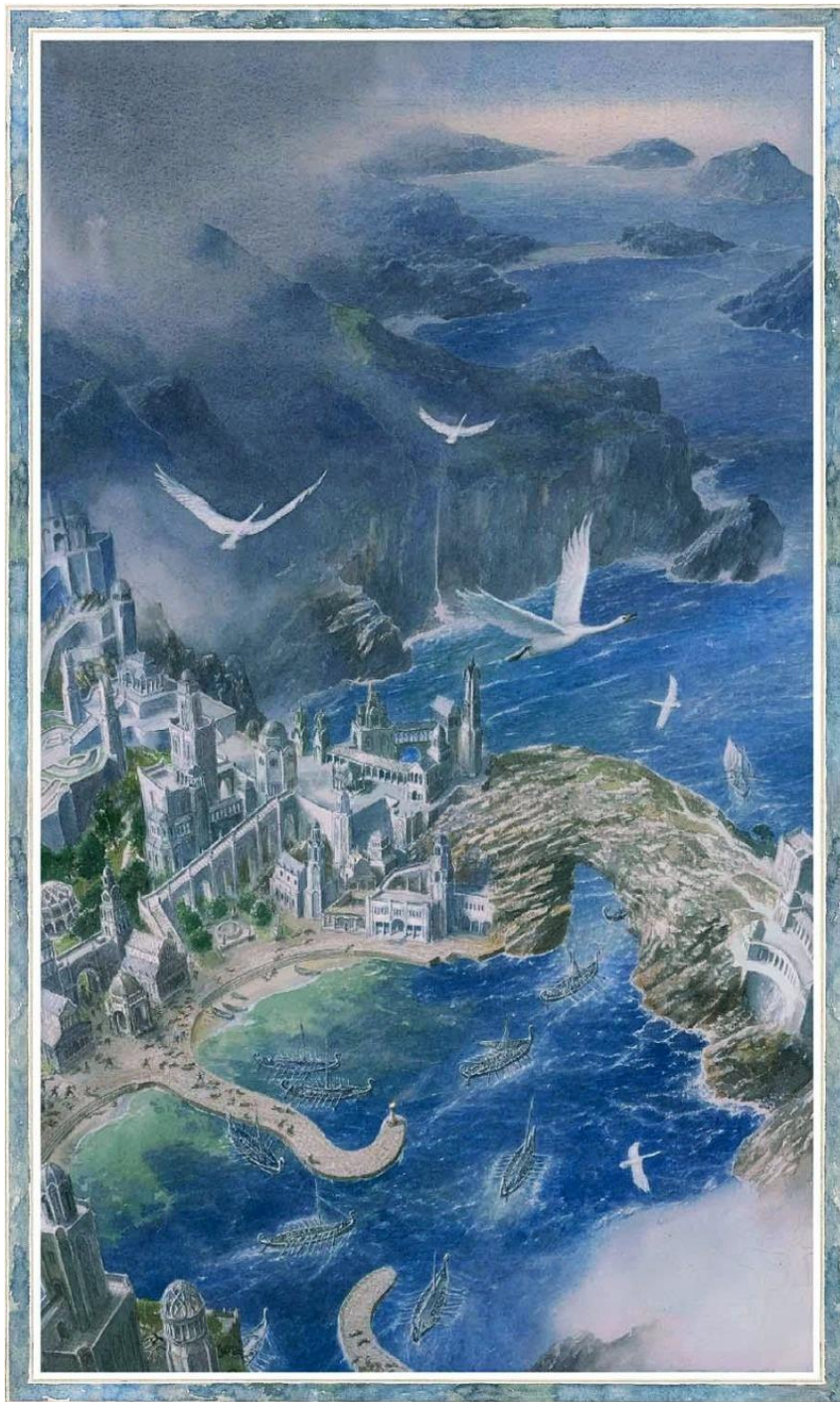


Figure 3 Alqualondë (Alan Lee, 2018)





Figure 4 Valinor - Alqualondë (*The Rings of Power*, 2022)

While there is no confirmation for this, the design of Valinor in *The Rings of Power* seems inspired by Alan Lees illustration of Alqualondë in *The Fall of Gondolin* in Figure 3 (Tolkien, Tolkien and Lee, 2018, p. 23). From the white building and arched architecture, the river flowing through the City, the number of plants compared to buildings, and most importantly, the white bridge pictured in Lee's illustration, which is repeated several times in the show's version of the City (see Figure 4). Both suggest advanced artisanry and an ethereal atmosphere.

Interestingly, Alan Lee's depiction also resembles the painting *Tír na nÓg* (Reid, 1910), inspired by Irish mythology (see Figure 5). Both show white domes and slender towers surrounded by nature. This connection is worth noting because Tolkien often drew from real-world myths when creating his Secondary World.



*Figure 5 - Tír na nÓg (Reid, 1910)*

### **Understanding Sub Creation in Tolkien's World**

Wolf explains what elements make a primary world believable. It is essential to have "consistency and internal logic," closely followed through Tolkien's invention of languages for Middle-earth, such as Sindarin or Quenya. His love for languages became one of the most famous examples of immersive complexity in fantasy worldbuilding. As Tolkien was a Philologist with a special interest in historical texts and Anglo-Saxon literature, Tolkien's Subcreation is mainly established through mythology, languages, and geography. (Wills, 2014)

"Inferences can also be very subtle and require the connecting of small details. For example, it is never stated directly that Tolkien's Elves have pointed ears, but the similarity between the Quenya words for 'leaf' and 'ear' suggest such a shape." (Wolf, 2013)



Figure 6 – Galadriel's pointed ears (*The Rings of Power*, 2022)

Sub-creation, then, involves new combinations of existing concepts, which, in the building of a Secondary World, become the inventions that replace or reset Primary World defaults (for example, new flora and fauna, new languages, new geography, and so forth). The more one changes these

defaults, the more the Secondary World becomes different and distinct from the Primary World. (Wolf, 2013, p. 24)

One remarkable thing about Tolkien's Worldbuilding is that every story experienced comes with a history of the Secondary World he created. Having immortal elves is advantageous as they can tell some of the stories first-hand and have lived through most of them. It also connects different stories, from *The Silmarillion* to *The Hobbit* to *The Lord of the Rings*, as secondary world history is constantly mentioned.

This difference of immortality highlights one of Wolf's main points about creative freedom: they do not need to mirror real-world rules but establish their own.

Many of the book's characters are related in elaborate family trees, and these relationships often play an important role in the stories. Throughout the book, various events are alluded to long after they have occurred, or are foretold long before they occur, requiring the reader to remember a good deal in order to understand the events and motivations behind them. (Wolf, 2013, p. 50)

By reshaping elements of the Primary World, such as family trees, language, and flora, into new forms that influence how we understand culture and identity, we become immersed. Tolkien's detailed genealogies and histories evoke the sense of learning from an ancient, living tradition. Just as in our World, we uncover connections and meaning by paying attention to detail. Even though Middle-earth features wizards, dragons, and magic, elements that do not exist in our World, these fantastical aspects still feel grounded because they echo the myths and stories of our primary world history. Myths from cultures around the World are filled with magical beings, enchanted objects, and extraordinary powers. By drawing on these universal archetypes, Tolkien builds this bridge between the Primary and Secondary Worlds. This brings me to Valinor's example of how Tolkien created his Subcreation. In his "Middle-earth Blog," Michael Martinez examines the connection between Irish mythology and Tolkien's work, particularly the similarities between Valinor and Tír na nÓg, the Land of Youth, in Irish Mythology. Both are paradises characterized by immortality and beauty, and both are difficult for mortals to access.

Martinez notes:

One of the notable characteristics of Valinor is that it is a land of perpetual youth and beauty — which sounds very much like Tír na nÓg. Of course, in Irish myth a mortal could travel to Tír na nÓg (though only with help from an immortal) and dwell there for what seemed a short period of time, which in mortal lands was equivalent to a very long time (at a ratio of 1-to-100 years), which should sound familiar to Tolkien readers. (Martinez, 2012)

This possible inspiration exists in our World as much as in Tolkien's; the difference is that it is history within Tolkien's world.

### **Conclusion:**

Valinor, as explored in this Chapter, is a good example of Tolkien's method of Subcreation. It serves as a symbolic representation of his ability to reshape elements from the Primary World into something new. By drawing from mythologies such as Irish folklore and incorporating detailed histories, family trees, and language, Tolkien creates an immersive world despite its fantastical elements. It also serves as a physical location that matters in the context of rings of power with the beginning of the elves. This Chapter demonstrates how previously existing art can be applied in production design, reflecting Tolkien's approach to inspiration. For instance, the concept art of Alqualondë (see Figure 3-5) uses familiar elements, such as swans or white buildings and innovatively reimagines them.



## Chapter Two:

### Lindon and Invention Completeness

This Chapter will look at Lindon, one of the many elven realms on the continent of Middle Earth. It is situated on the western coast next to the Blue Mountains. This Chapter examines Lindon's history and context in Tolkien's works and *The Rings of Power*. I will use Wolf's concept of Invention Completeness to highlight how production designers can use narrative choices from its source text and earlier concept art to build something that has not been shown on screen.



Figure 7 – Map of Lindon (*The Rings of Power*, 2022)

#### **Lindon in Tolkien's History**

As written in Appendix A, Elves settled the area of Ossiriand/Beleriand during the First Age. In the War of Wrath, the West's fight against Morgoth caused massive destruction, submerging much of the Land. During the Second Age, described in Appendix B, Lindon, the only region west of the Blue Mountains to survive, became a vital haven for the Elves. Ship Ports, including the Grey Havens, were built along

the newly formed river, making Lindon a functional and symbolic gateway between Middle-earth and Valinor. High King Gil-Galad led Lindon into a political and military stronghold during the Second Age, resisting Sauron. (Tolkien, 2009, p.1421)

### **Lindon's Worldbuilding for the Second Age**

When searching for physical and architectural descriptions of Lindon in Tolkien's works, the primary sources are *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales*. However, even in his primary text, Tolkien focuses on Lindon's geography and history. However, he does describe the Elves' deep connection to nature, portraying Lindon as a land of music and unseen woodcraft. The text focuses on the events of the First Age and the Elves' history in Beleriand, only briefly mentioning the Second Age, such as in the last Chapter of *The Silmarillion*, called the *The Rings of Power*. (Tolkien and Tolkien, 1999, p.58)

Mark Wolf's "Invention Completeness" concept refers to how self-sufficient and richly detailed a fictional world feels. While Tolkien's Middle-earth is highly complete, the Second Age, and Lindon specifically, lacks detail. It challenged designers to link the well-described First and Third Ages and the Second Age. This gave designers much more freedom but increased the pressure to align with the existing Worldbuilding.

Ramsey Avery's approach emphasizes the balance of differentiating the show from others like *Game of Thrones*, which shares a similar aesthetic and is also set in a fantasy world. It should resemble Middle Earth as everyone knows it, yet be distinctly different, set decades earlier during a more glorious age, unlike the third age, characterized by decay.

"We are not doing the Peter Jackson movies. We have to go back and figure out what that Second Age looks like, but because they had the DNA inside of them, of all of that, that element was still there, and it informed and blossomed into the things that we were trying to do specifically with our stories." (Avery in Jones, 2023)

## Visual Design in The Rings of Power

In *The Rings of Power*, Lindon plays a crucial role in developing key characters and plot points. Here, we first witness Galadriel as the commander of Lindon's northern armies and Gil-Galad as King. Lindon's significance plays a crucial role in the Elves' fight against Sauron during the first two seasons, which anchors much of the story in this region of Middle Earth. For Lindon's design to be successful, it not only needs to look beautiful as an Elven stronghold but also makes sense within the World of Middle-Earth.

The art department for *The Rings of Power* has developed Lindon's design using two main approaches: relying on visual references from concept artists and possessing a deep understanding of Tolkien's work, ensuring consistency with the source material and its thematic interests.

### The Grey Havens and its concept artists



Figure 8 – *The Grey Havens* (Howe, 2011)

In John Howes' painting *The Grey Havens*, you can see two viewpoints, looking towards and away from the port (see Figure 8). In the top panel, you can see the port



from which the ships sail; on the shore, a path lined with tall, slender trees leads to a small structure. Two fire towers can be seen, which could function like lighthouses alerting nearby boats. The rest of the image portrays the ethereal landscape of the ocean and the blue mountains in the background. In the second panel, you can see the swan boats surrounded by the flying swans accompanying the elves towards Valinor.

The Grey Havens in *The Rings of Power* follow a similar simplicity. A hut, a watchtower and a few boats lined up. The mountains are in the background, and the ocean opens between them. The Tower could be seen as something like a lighthouse, similar to the fires in Howe's painting, with roots and ivy wrapped around the top. On top is an elven dome with organic curves and intricate designs that show off elven artistry, which can hint that this place is known for its beautiful boat crafting. Visually, it could also be tied to how Viking Ports looked and how they are being depicted in our history.



Figure 9 – The Port of the Grey Havens (*The Rings of Power*, 2024)

## Visuals in Lord of the Rings

Our only encounter with Lindon in Peter Jackson's movies is at the end of *The Return of the King*, the third movie. The Swan boat and various architectural features of the area are visible. By this time, Lindon has significantly diminished in power following the death of Gil-Galad and the absence of a king. In the background, we can see Cirdan, the Shipwright who served as regent of Lindon until its decline.



Figure 10 – *The Grey Havens* (Peter Jackson, 2003)

Comparing the images at the end of *Return of the King* reveals an interesting contrast. The film displays a large city with many buildings and a big port, while *Rings of Power* features a more straightforward, more minor port. This difference is logical, as the Elven lands in *Rings of Power* are still at peace and have not yet reached their full potential, eliminating the need for a large port or sailing to Valinor.

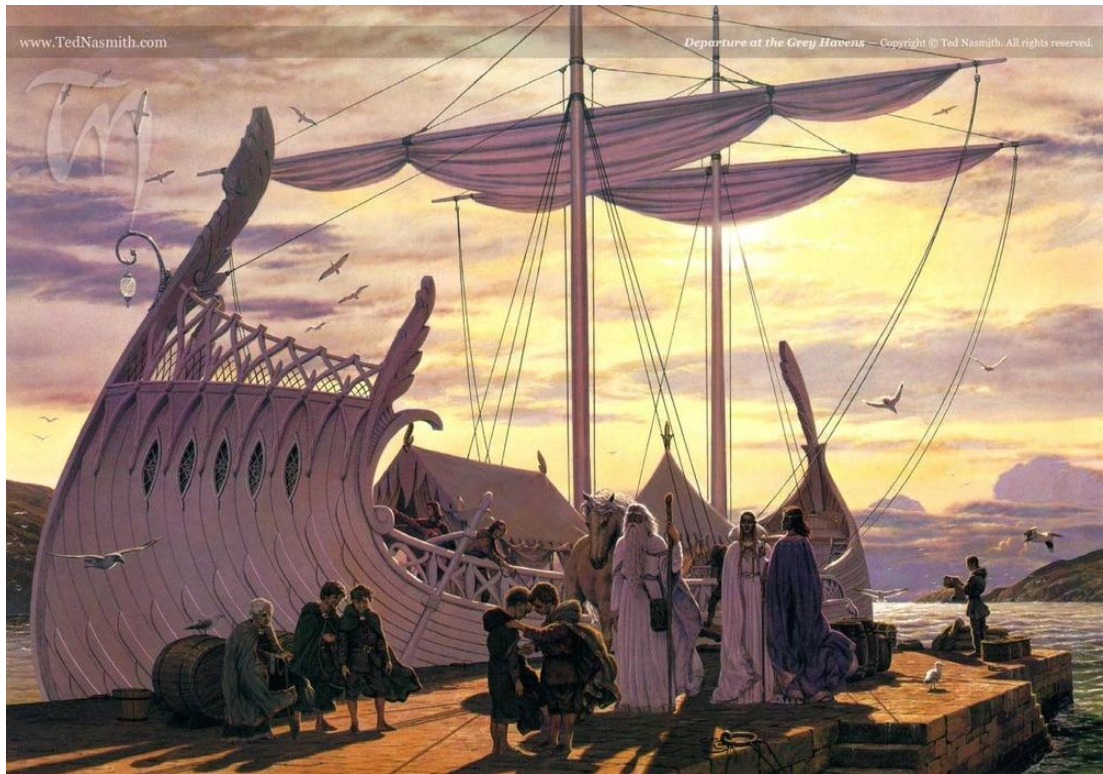


Figure 11– *Departure at the Grey Havens* (Nasmith, 2012)

Ted Nasmith's illustration captures the *Return of the King* scene, specifically the Departure at the Grey Havens, published in 1996, which seems almost 1 to 1 what was shown in *Return of the King* (see Figure 10).



Figure 12 *The Grey Havens* (Lee, 2005)

Alan Lee was alongside John Howe, one of the most significant influences on *The Lord of the Rings* as a concept artist. In his sketchbook, Lee includes several images of the Grey Havens. This illustration identifies three essential characteristics: the tree, path, and elvish architectural dome. Additionally, we see cities on mountains in the background, which reflects how the City of Lindon is portrayed in *Rings of Power*.

### **Trees and Symbolism about Tolkien's life**

On a hill just outside the western golden gates of Valinor, the Valar grew two huge magical trees...these trees of Valinor gave off a brilliant glow of gold and silver light. The waxing and waning of each tree blossoming gave a means by which the days might be measured, and their light nourished all who lived within the glowing presence. (Day, 2015, p. 46)

These trees from Valinor inspired all the magical trees on Middle Earth. The primary source text of *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales* mentions that no magical tree would grow in Lindon, but that Gil-Galad gave the seeds to Galadriel, and she took them into Lothlorien and grew a Mallorn there. (Tolkien and Tolkien, 1999, p.142) In the show, the tree grows in Lindon and becomes a significant plot point, as it is slowly dying and can only be saved by the rings.

Ramsey Avery explains that designing for the Second Age involved creating visual anchors that were distinctive and specific to each area, much like the Grey Havens. One of these anchors was the trees:

Let's find a way to make the Elvish Forest, rather than the darkness that we see in Galadriel's forest in the movies, let's make it bright and literally golden. So, the trees are birches or aspen so that they are always in gold. And funnily enough, when you go into the words of Tolkien, you find that his trees are gold all the time. (Avery in Jones, 2023)



There is no doubt, from reading anything Tolkien, that trees are crucial to his storytelling and worldbuilding. Many scholars have examined the role of trees in his writing, noting how they symbolize beauty, endurance, and a longing for a world unspoiled by industrialization. Tolkien's love for trees was not just aesthetic but deeply personal. As Humphrey Carpenter notes in his biography, "And though he liked drawing trees, he liked most of all to be with trees." (1977, p. 24).

His strong opinions on nature also shaped the moral framework of his stories: "As a lover of trees and a man who abhorred the needless destruction of them, Tolkien the writer often defined his characters as good or evil in part by their feelings about trees. Many of the evil people in his stories are tree-destroyers." (Finseth, 1997). This connection between nature and morality runs throughout Middle-earth and can be connected to *Rings of Power*.

At the same time, Tolkien's broader worldview, including his experiences in war, also played a role in shaping Middle-earth. Shippey suggests that, like other post-WWII writers, Tolkien used Fantasy as a way to explore themes of war and evil, believing they were too vast to be tied to any single real-world setting. (Shippey, 1996). This perspective shaped everything from Middle-earth's landscapes to its conflicts, and by weaving these familiar symbols into the new visual language, we can tie it back to Mark Wolf's concept of Invention Completeness, which suggests that for a fictional world to feel fully formed, new additions must connect to what is already established.

In this case, Tolkien's worldview, love for trees, war experiences, and fascination with mythology shaped the foundation of Middle-earth. Incorporating these elements in *The Rings of Power* naturally strengthens the sense of completeness.

## Conceptual Art and Architecture



Figure 13- Lindon evening Banquet (F. Castro, 2024)



Figure 14- Lindon evening Banquet (The Rings of Power, 2022)

Ramsey Avery also tried to show the magnificence of the age while incorporating echoes of architecture from the Third Age, like Elvish arches, in an earlier form, which were influenced by Art Nouveau, which I will explore in more detail in Chapter Four.

A fitting example is this scene where several characters sit together for a feast. The concept artist Roberto F. Castro gives us further insight into the set: "The intention

was to include just a few architectural elements and let the forest be the main part of the set. The only manufactured elements are the hanging elven lamps, the tree trunks decorations, the iconic elven gazebo in the background and the long hanging tapestries." (F. Castro, 2024)



Figure 15- Lindon Tree (*The Rings of Power*, 2022)

In other parts of Lindon, such as the central platform next to the tree, we can see that they explored a lot with platforms and different height positions, which connect closely with Alan Lee's drawings about Lindon from 2000, which show a city built into a mountain and a forest. It has a round platform and naturalistic shapes right at the cliff, showing the ocean towards Valinor.



Figure 16- Lindon (*The Rings of Power*, 2022)

There is also an establishing shot for Lindon, which is the first time you see the entire City (see Figure 17). The design incorporates the familiar shape of the arch,



which is commonly seen in previous visualizations of Elven architecture. Concept artist Julien Gauthier created detailed artwork of these buildings, which he said was inspired by an earlier sketch by John Howe. This is another example of them using old existing concept art and mixing it with a new idea inspired by the primary text, in this case, the golden trees, to make a believable Lindon. This is also something Wolf speaks about; he calls it Aesthetic Coherence, which in the World of Tolkien in both his books, illustrations but also the movies by Peter Jackson and the new *Rings of Power* show means that all elements of the World (visual, cultural and narrative) must work together to make it immersive. All species have a distinct cultural aesthetic in clothes, architecture and weapons, reflecting cultures and history in the primary World.

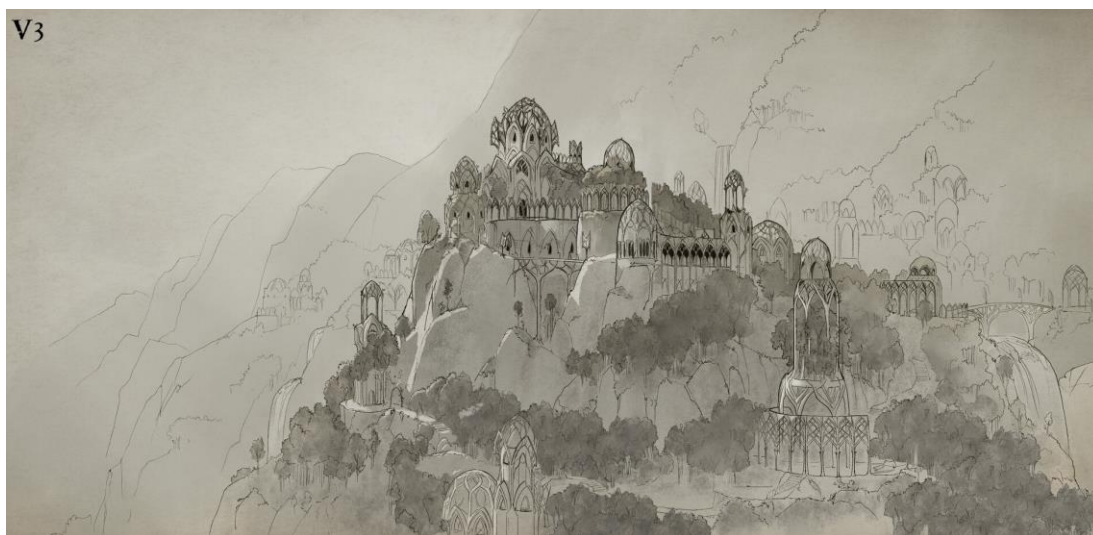


Figure 17- Lindon (Gauthier J. 2024)

While Tolkien's Middle-earth is renowned for its completeness, the Second Age, and Lindon specifically, lacks the same depth of detail. Highlighted in Mark Wolf's theory of 'Invention Completeness', this absence of detail presented both a challenge and an opportunity for the production team. Drawing from the detailed descriptions of the First and Third Ages, designers worked to bridge the gaps while embracing the creative freedom afforded by the less-defined Second Age. By taking inspiration from Tolkien's primary text and incorporating new visual elements like the golden trees, the production team brought Lindon to life in a way that felt authentic to the Second Age.



## Chapter Three:

### Eregion and Cultural Reflections

In this Chapter, I will explore Eregion and its central City, Ost-in-Edhil. It is essential not only in *The Rings of Power* but also in the general history of Middle Earth as it is the birthplace of the rings that shape all of Tolkien's stories. I will investigate Eregion's geographical and historical significance and connections to ruins, Renaissance plazas, and Mark Wolf's theory on Cultural Reflections in Worldbuilding: "Fantasy does not blur the sharp outlines of the real world; for it depends on them. All secondary worlds reflect or resemble the Primary World in some way; otherwise, we would not be able to relate to them." (Wolf, 2013, p.62)



Figure 18– Map of Eregion and Khazad-Dum (*The Rings of Power*, 2022)

#### **Geography and History of Eregion in Tolkien's World:**

Eregion, also known as Hollin ("Land of the Holly"), is a significant location in Middle-earth's Second Age. The central City of Ost-in-Edhil, or "Fortress of the Elves," was a hub of creativity where Celebrimbor founded the Gwaith-i-Mírdain (Brotherhood of Jewel-smiths).

Eregion sits west of the Misty Mountains and near the Dwarven kingdom of Khazad-dûm. As described in Appendix B:

Later some of the Noldor went to Eregion, upon the West of the Misty Mountains, and near to the West-gate of Moria. This they did because they learned that mithril had been discovered in Moria. The Noldor were great craftsmen and less unfriendly to the Dwarves than the Sindar, but the friendship between the people of Durin and the Elven smiths of Eregion was the closest that there has ever been between the two races. (Tolkien, 2009, p.1421)

This shared geography led to the most important collaboration between the elves and dwarves. The dwarves provided them with the metal Mithril, and the Elves created three rings for themselves, seven rings for the Dwarves, and nine rings for Men, as told in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*. However, this partnership also paved the way for Eregion's destruction when Sauron, disguised as Annatar, manipulated the Elves into crafting rings that ultimately served him, including the one ring created by Sauron himself. Sauron's army later overran Eregion, killing Celebrimbor and displacing his people. (Tolkien and Tolkien, 2002, pp.1422)

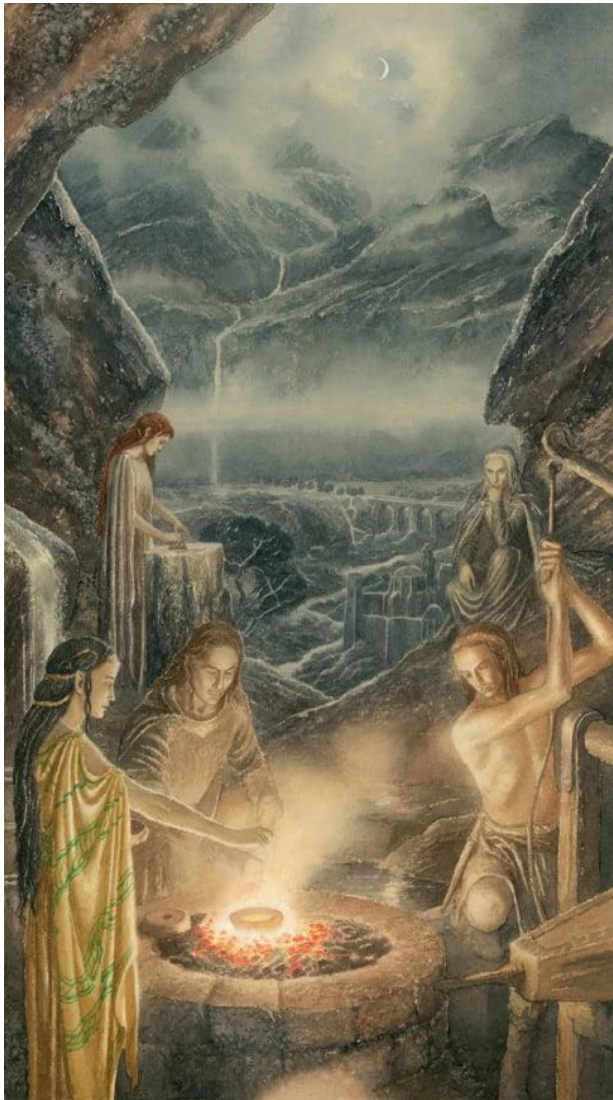


Figure 19–Alan Lee, *The Forging of the Rings*, Watercolour (Tolkien Gateway, 2012)

The story of Eregion portrays a tragic irony: a place of beauty and creativity destroyed by the very creations that should be protecting it. This tension between the elves' desire to preserve beauty and their sensitivity to corruption is one of the most important themes in *The Rings of Power*. In this painting by Alan Lee (see Figure 19), you can see a depiction of the view from Eregion towards the Misty Mountains. In the background on the left, the figure is possibly Annatar, and in the foreground, Celebrimbor and his smiths. The atmosphere feels simultaneously tense and magical, as something special is being created. This sensation is similarly depicted in *The Rings of Power*.

### **Eregion's Ruins in Lord of the Rings:**

The ruins of Eregion are briefly referenced in the book *The Fellowship of the Ring*, where Gandalf and the fellowship reach Eregion after just leaving Rivendell: "There is a wholesome air about Hollin. Much evil must befall a country before it wholly forgets the Elves if once they dwelt there." (Tolkien, 2015, p. 369)

Another description notes:

[They] struck a good path. It looked to Frodo like the remains of an ancient road, that had once been broad and well planned, from Hollin to the mountain-pass.... Many of [the stones] looked to have been worked by hands, though now they lay tumbled and ruinous in a bleak, barren land. (Tolkien, 2015, p. 375)



Figure 20–The Fellowship passing the Ruins in *The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring*, 2001, (Peter Jackson, 2001)

In Peter Jackson's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, a brief shot of ruins near the gates of Moria raised much speculation. Some fans suspected these were the remnants of Ost-in-Edhil / Hollin, a possibility that, while exciting, is at odds with the established geography and history of Eregion as described by Tolkien. The ruins seen in the film



are positioned on a mountainside, whereas Ost-in-Edhil was built in a valley closer to Khazad-dûm.

Even if not geographically accurate, the decision to include these ruins holds symbolic value. As one fan remarked on Reddit, "I could easily believe that PJ (Peter Jackson) put those at least as a nod to the ancient city of Celebrimbor or some ruins that show us that Elves used to live there." (Werthead, 2019) This interpretation draws attention to the emotional effect of ruins within Middle-earth, similar to the quote by Gandalf. As further proof of their attention to the Elves' past, they have incorporated a tapestry of Eregion in Rivendell. Alan Lee created this painting, the only "official" concept art depicting Eregion.



*Figure 21– Ost-in-Edhil (Alan Lee)*

Interestingly enough, I found a separate artwork by Alan Lee, "Armenelos", which is geographically in Numenor, but has many similarities to the set in Rings of Power.



Figure 22—Alan Lee, *Armanelos*, (*Tolkien Gateway*, 2012)

Compared to the actual illustration Ost-in-Edhil by Alan Lee, it has more similarities with the ruins we see in the Peter Jackson movies. While the ruins of Eregion are referenced in Tolkien's texts and visually interpreted in Jackson's adaptations, *The Rings of Power* delves deeper into the artistry and symbolism of Eregion, mainly through its central set, the Forge.



Figure 23– Ost-in-Edhil (*The Rings of Power*, 2023)

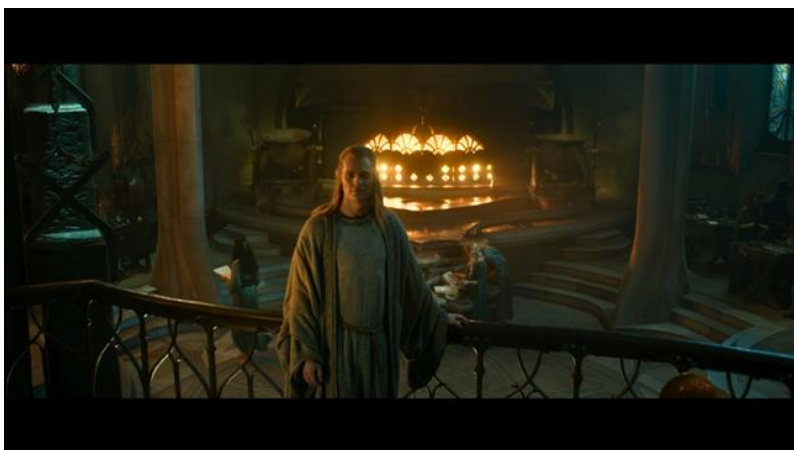


Figure 24–Celebrimbor's Forge, Pictured Annatar –(*The Rings of Power*, 2022)



Figure 25- Celebrimbor in his Forge (*The Rings of Power*, 2023)

Under the leadership of Kristian Milsted, who took over as production designer in Season 2, the series leans into the artistic and symbolic aspects of Eregion's role in the forging of the Rings of Power. Central to this portrayal is Celebrimbor's Forge, in which they emphasize the power and artistry of the Forge. "For Celebrimbor's forge, the thought was that it's like a temple," Milsted explained. "Tall, elegant, really fine lines and wood floors, amber and elements of gold." (Milsted in Shachat, 2024)

This view highlights the nature of the creations made there and gives the area a holy quality. Fire is a literal element in the design of the Forge, which serves as the focus with its workspace in front of it. It combines innovation and functionality through its curving channels that transfer heat from the central fire to several workstations.



Figure 26—Celebrimbor in his Forge (*The Rings of Power*, 2023)

As Jaron Pak notes in an online article, the prominence of fire in the Forge recalls Gandalf's words: "It has been said that dragon-fire could melt and consume the Rings of Power, but there is not now any dragon left on earth in which the old fire is hot enough." (Tolkien, 1954, P.61) This is particularly interesting when compared to what we have seen so far of the elves, who usually live in harmony with nature. Here, however, the imagery seems different - it is as if they are utilizing and controlling fire, a noticeable change from their usual depiction.





Figure 27– *The Tower of the Forge (The Rings of Power, 2023)*

The architectural design of the Tower housing the Forge and the Forge itself echoes elements of Art Deco with the use of marble and fireproof materials, an aesthetic often associated with the Design of the Dwarves in Middle Earth rather than the Elves (see Figure 29). In our primary World, Art Deco is a design style from the 1920s and 1930s known for its bold geometry, rich colours, and luxury. This style reflects the capitalism of the time and the pursuit of wealth through mass production. (Craig, 2020). The visual connection between Eregion and Khazad-dûm reflects primary-world industrial success and trading, highlighting the collaboration between Elves and Dwarves at the peak of their economic success. The golden tones and intricate detailing in organic forms also tie us back to the set of Lindon to keep it connected to the World of Middle Earth.

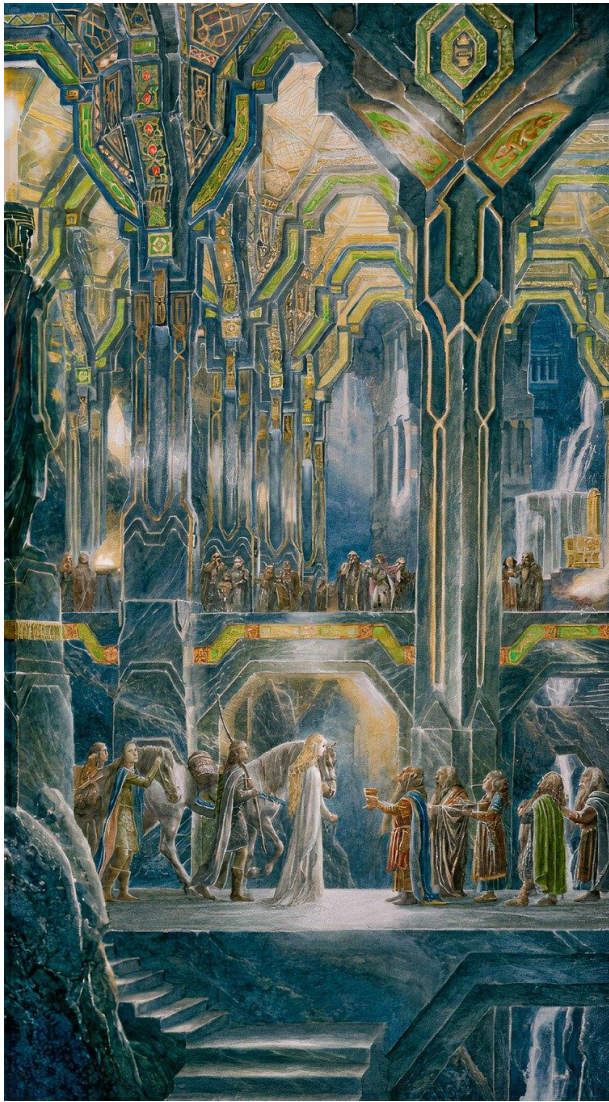


Figure 28—Alan Lee, *Galadriel in Moria*, (*Tolkien Gateway*, 2012)

## Cultural and Architectural Parallels

Whether in Middle-earth or the Primary World, ruins often connect us to the past.

The philosopher Elizabeth Scarbrough observes in a journal article:

Ruins have always meant a lot to humans as they connect us to our history.

This is the nature of the ruin: they help us imagine the past, afford us interesting aesthetic opportunities in the present, and ask us to project ourselves (and it) into the future. We think about those who once lived, our current experience, and what will be." (Scarbrough, 2018)

Mark Wolf expands on this by highlighting how fictional cultures draw on real-world history:

The Anglo-Saxons serve as the model for Tolkien's Riders of Rohan in their poetry, names, and customs. This makes them more believable and gives them an underlying logic that connects the various aspects of their culture. While the casual reader may not have any background in Anglo-Saxon history, their cultural logic remains, adding consistency and aiding in the filling of gaps. (Wolf, 2013, p. 55)

Based on these statements, Eregion similarly reflects Renaissance Italy, a time of innovation and artistry, political tensions, and eventual decline. Like the Renaissance, Eregion represents a golden age of creativity. The collaboration between Elves and Dwarves produced exceptional works like the Renaissance masterpieces by Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. The Renaissance architecture reflects classical traditions, emphasizing domes, arches, geometric harmony, and the Renaissance ideals of beauty and proportion. Like what we see in Eregion, Ost-in-Edhil is designed with an eye for aesthetic perfection and functionality, focusing on domes, arches and beauty (see Figure 30)

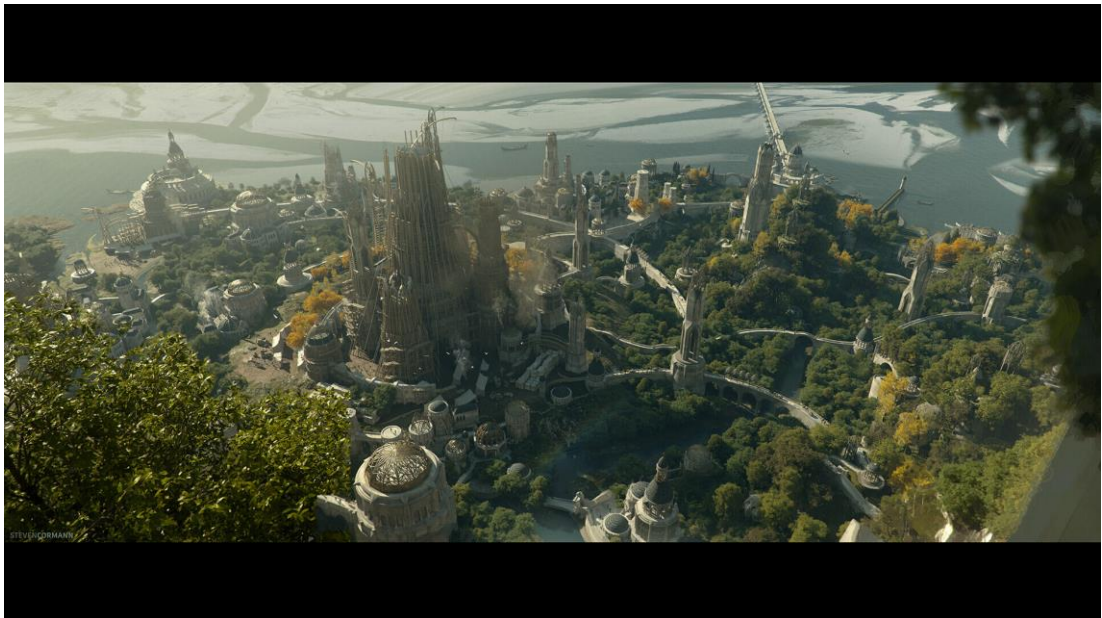


Figure 29– Eregion being built, (*The Rings of Power*, 2022)

Similarly, Eregion's tall towers and intricate designs make it feel like an ancient city that might have existed in our world. Similarly, the city walls there for protection remind me of the walls of medieval cities (see Figure 31 and 32).





Figure 30-The Fall of Eregion (*The Rings of Power*, 2022)



Figure 31-Giorgio Vasari, *Arnolfo Shows the Plan to Enlarge Florence* (detail), c. 1564. (Simonetta, 2010)

## Production Design and Its Inspirations

*Tolkien's The History of Middle-Earth, Volume 10 – Morgoth's Ring* describes the city and its architecture, noting: "And in all crafts of hand they (Noldor) delighted also, and their masons built many towers tall and slender, and many halls and houses of marble." (Tolkien, 2021, p.166) *The Rings of Power's* production design reflects this connection between Primary World history and Secondary World texts. Ramsey Avery explains: "It was basically taking each culture, finding the underlying characteristic to define it, looking for real-world elements in art history that we could relate to, massaging those ideas together, and making sure it fit within the story." (Avery in Jones, 2023)

Tolkien's descriptions of Elven's artistry are brought to life by the design team by fusing his ideas with actual artistic styles, such as Renaissance and Art Deco.

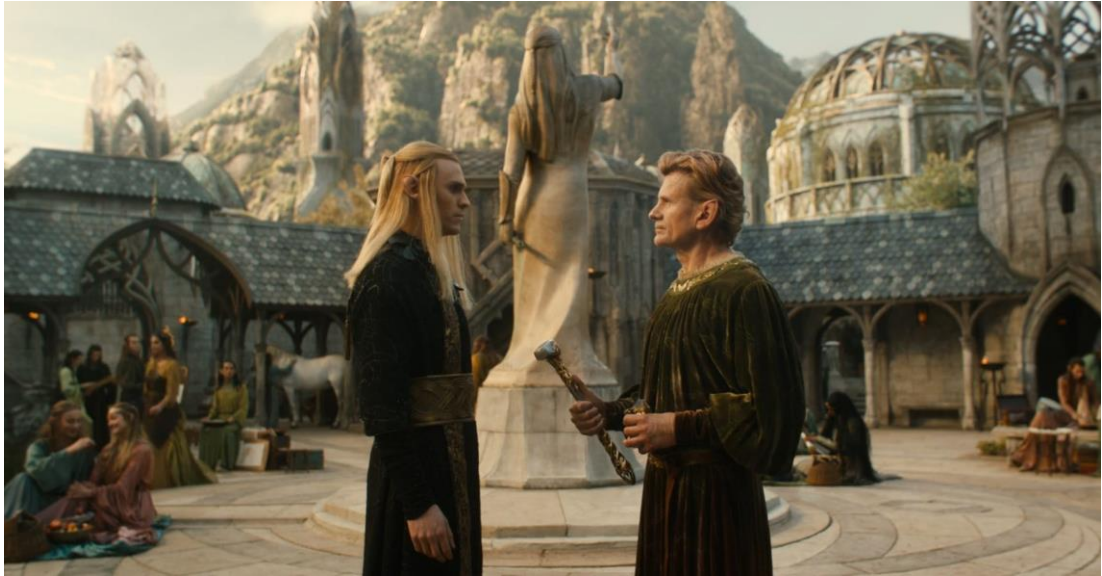


Figure 32 - Town Square (*The Rings of Power*, 2023)

For example, the town square in Eregion, where Celebrimbor and Annatar meet (see Figure 33), resembles Renaissance piazzas like the Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome, designed for community and artistic display. Both squares are round with intricate organic symbols and a central statue (see Figure 34). The Eregion square also contains buildings with tracery domes, like Rivendell, and squared-off towers more reminiscent of the Dwarves' halls.



Figure 33- Town Square (*The Rings of Power*, 2023)

In Eregion, the statue of Fëanor holds a hammer, which connects the visual storytelling to Celebrimbor and foreshadows the dangerous legacy and his downfall. In contrast, the statue on the Piazza depicts Marcus Aurelius in a heroic stance on a horse, symbolizing the Golden Age of the Roman Empire (Crook (2019)). It is fair to say that both figures represent legacies marked by tragedy: Marcus Aurelius faced the collapse of his empire, while Fëanor's legacy led to the destruction of his people and the Silmarils.

### **Conclusion:**

Tolkien's Worldbuilding challenges us to explore where specific inspirations or sources come from and how they relate to our World. For example, Peter Jackson's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, with its depiction of the ruins near Moria, sparked an interest in Ost-in-Edhil, even if it is not geographically accurate. Likewise, *The Rings of Power* is still developing, leading to speculation about its inspirations, such as the Renaissance influences in the design of Eregion. The town square reminded me of Piazza del Campidoglio, whether intentionally or not. This is Wolf's idea that familiar cultural elements enrich fictional worlds. Eregion reflects the creativity and ambition of many past cities in our world and the ruins they have become. It is a Reminder of their downfall and tragic histories. By overlapping the magic of Eregion with its creation of the Rings and the echoes of our real-world history, it creates a world where viewers of *The Rings of Power* can feel like they are stepping into Middle-earth yet encounter something exciting and unexplored at the same time.



## Chapter Four –

### **Rivendell and Immersion**

In this Chapter, I will focus on Rivendell, another significant location in Tolkien's Middle-earth. While Valinor, Lindon, and Eregion from previous chapters present new visual additions to Middle-earth, Rivendell has already been shown on screen. It is also important to mention that the City of Rivendell, as we remember in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, does not physically exist at this Moment. However, its geographical landscape is revealed in the final episode and end scene of Season 2. This chapter also takes on a more personal aspect for me. Rivendell's Design is heavily inspired by Switzerland, my birthland, making this an exciting connection to explore, especially by tying this to Wolf's concept of immersion and absorption.

#### **The End of Season 2**

Rivendell, ruled by the Half-Elf Elrond, is a significant city for the elves in Tolkien's World, especially in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. "Known as the "Last Homely House East of the Sea," it was a house of wisdom and great learning and served as a refuge for all Elves and Men of goodwill." (Day, 2015, p.185)



Figure 34 - Rivendell in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, 2001

Bilbo Baggins finds refuge after his adventures in *The Hobbit* and later returns here to complete his book and retire. It is also the place where the Fellowship of the Ring was formed in Elrond's Council. Rivendell's origins are described in *Unfinished Tales*: "Elrond was able to extricate himself, but he was forced away northwards, and it was at that time [...] that he established a refuge and stronghold at Imladris (Rivendell)." (Tolkien and Tolkien, 2014, p.175)

In the final moments of Season 2 of *The Rings of Power*, we are introduced to the landscape of Rivendell for the first time. Still an uninhabited valley, it is where Galadriel, Elrond, Arondir, and Gil-galad stand on a cliff, looking down at what will one day become the City of Rivendell under Elrond's leadership (see Figure 36).



*Figure 35 - End of Season 2 (The Rings of Power, 2023)*

This moment, shown in the image above, shows the undisturbed valley with a few survivors from the battle of Eregion looking up at Gil-galad raising his sword. In stark contrast to Eregion's destruction, the composition is peaceful and hopeful. Forests, waterfalls, and mist-covered hills cover the landscape. In the heart of the valley, a zig-zagging river flows downstream from the waterfall. The positioning of the river and the enclosed hills and woods highlights the valley's hidden and secluded nature.



## Inspirations and Switzerland:

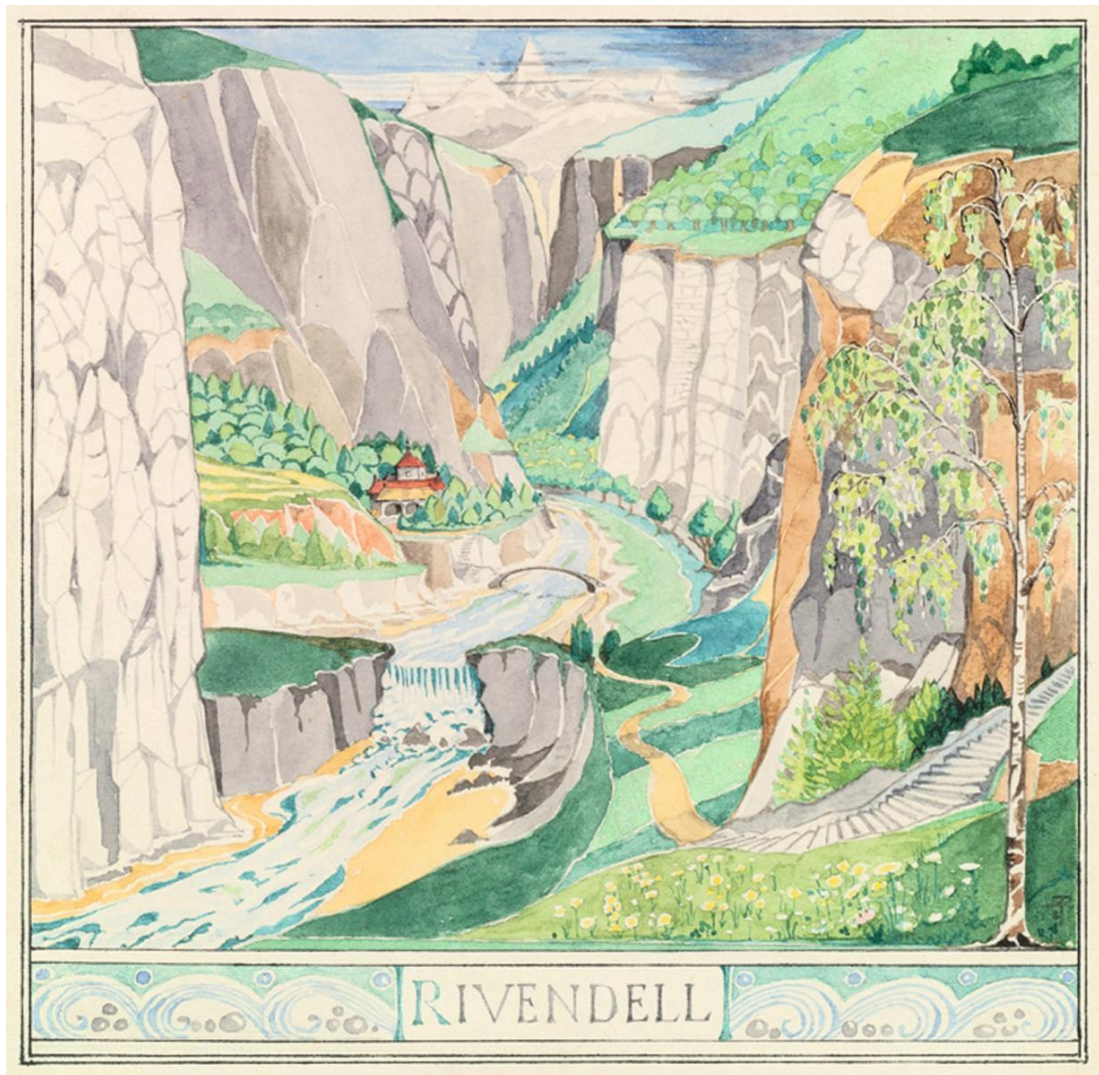


Figure 36 - The Fair Valley of Rivendell (Tolkien, 1938)

"The Fair Valley of Rivendell" is a detailed watercolour painting by J.R.R Tolkien, published in 1938 in the second edition of *The Hobbit*. It shows a valley nestled between the misty mountains with sharp peaks covered in snow in the back. The Valley has green trees, foliage, a river called Bruinen and a waterfall. A few Elven buildings can be seen in the background that blend in with their natural surroundings. Its atmosphere is a sense of calm and peace and shows the last hidden refuge in the wild nature of Middle Earth. The main inspiration for Rivendell and its Landscape is Lauterbrunnen, Switzerland. (Hammond and Scull, 2023)

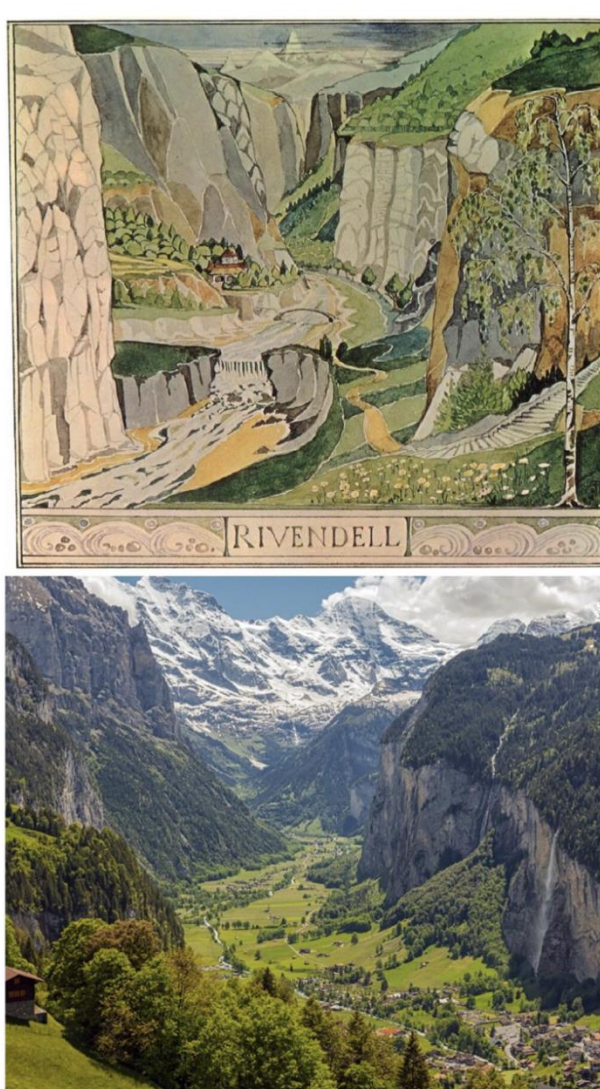


Figure 37 - Lauterbrunnen (Greisinger, 2017)

As I am from Switzerland, I was immediately fascinated by Tolkien's travels and connections with my home country. It also gives us a good cultural context of where Tolkien was around this time as he was only 19, an orphan living in England and had never seen this kind of landscape, or some of the hotels and bridges he came across.

In the book *Switzerland in Tolkien's Middle-Earth: In the footsteps of his adventurous summer journey in 1911*, Martin Monsch goes through several locations Tolkien has described directly correlating with the area of Lauterbrunnen in Switzerland.

Tolkien's drawings of Rivendell are a first clue to his source of inspiration: the rock faces on both sides, the flat valley with the stream in between, and

the high mountains in the background — all these elements strongly recall the Lauterbrunnen Valley. (Monsch, 2021)

This observation made by Monsch correlates very well with this text passage from *The Fellowship of the Ring*:

[Sam] found his friends sitting in a porch on the side of the house looking east. Shadows had fallen in the Valley below, but there was still a light on the faces of the mountains far above. The air was warm. The sound of running and falling water was loud, and the evening was filled with a faint scent of trees and flowers, as if summer still lingered in Elrond's gardens. (Tolkien, 1954, p.226)

This shows that Switzerland heavily inspired Tolkien, influencing some of his illustrations.

### **Production Design and Art Nouveau**

Elvish architecture in Tolkien's works blends seamlessly with his paintings, drawing deep inspiration from nature. This mirrors the Art Nouveau period, which flourished from 1899 to 1910. Interestingly, this was also when Tolkien visited Switzerland in 1911, where the movement was particularly influential. (Monsch, 2021) Art Nouveau grew out of a desire to break away from the rigid constraints of industrialization. It embraced organic shapes inspired by nature, blending modernity with a return to artisanry. (Orman, 2012). This connects to Tolkien's opposition to industrialization, which I discussed earlier in the Chapter on Lindon and his deep connection to trees.

In architecture, Art Nouveau was all about flowing lines and asymmetry, drawing from the forms of plants, flowers, and other natural elements. One of the movement's most iconic figures, Antoni Gaudí, the creator of masterpieces like the Sagrada Família in Barcelona (See Figure 39), incorporated a lot of floral patterns and columns that echo the shape of trees, blending the organic with the architectural. (Orman, 2012).



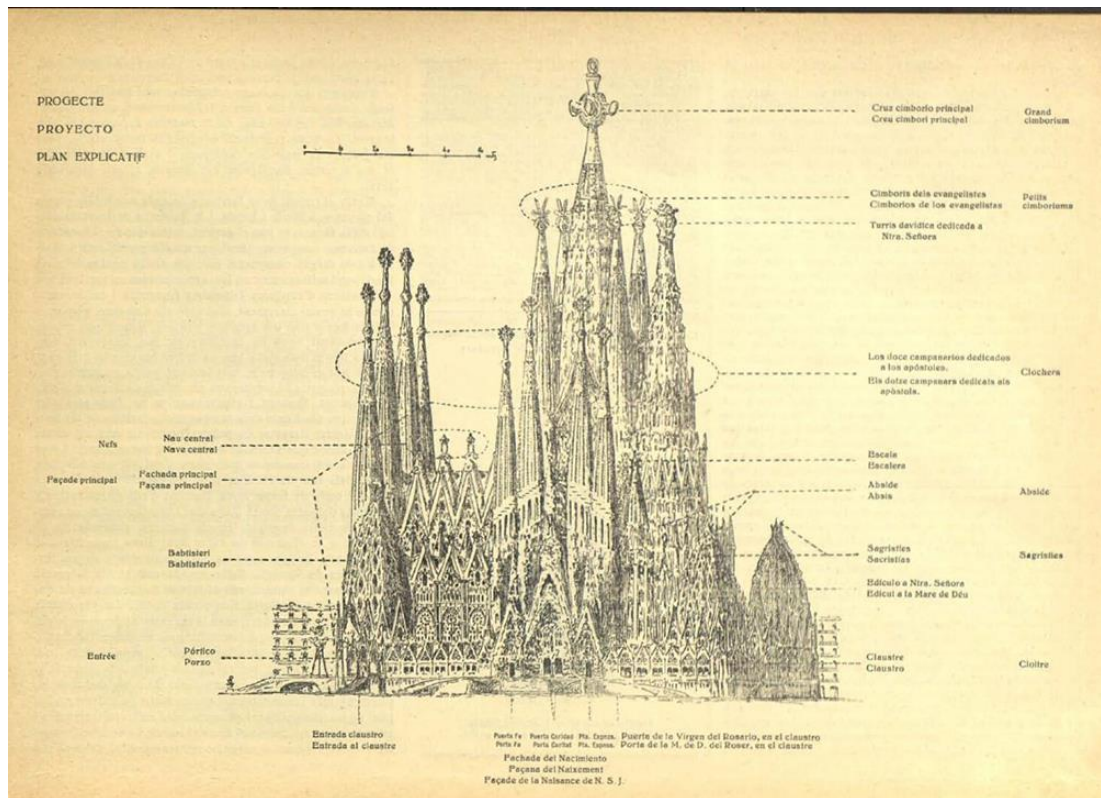


Figure 38– Gaudí, *La Sagrada Familia*, Drawing, 1929 (Gaudí, 2019)

*The Lord of the Rings* designs by Alan Lee and John Howe reflect this organic influence. The Elven cities, such as Rivendell, are renowned for their elegant arches and fluid designs that blend seamlessly with nature. In *The Making of The Lord of the Rings* documentary, Alan Lee shared that his design process began with drawing trees, and he gradually added architectural elements that seemed to grow naturally from the environment.

As John Howe explains, "You have to search for some form of simplicity... it is about using natural forms and flowing graceful lines"—a philosophy central to Art Nouveau and Celtic Design. Like the Elves, Art Nouveau viewed nature as the ultimate designer (The Saint Louis Art Museum, 2021)

In addition to Art Nouveau, Howe and Lee drew from Celtic visual culture, using natural motifs to shape their designs. For instance, the flowing water waves of the River Ford of Bruinen are reflected in Howe's sketches. The designers "mined history" to shape Rivendell's architecture, blending natural and historical elements to

create a set where the architecture feels like an organic part of the Land. (Howe, 2001)



*Figure 39 - Alan Lee, Rivendell, 2005 (Tolkien Gateway, 2012)*



Figure 40 - Rivendell Set in *The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring*, 2001, (Peter Jackson, 2001)

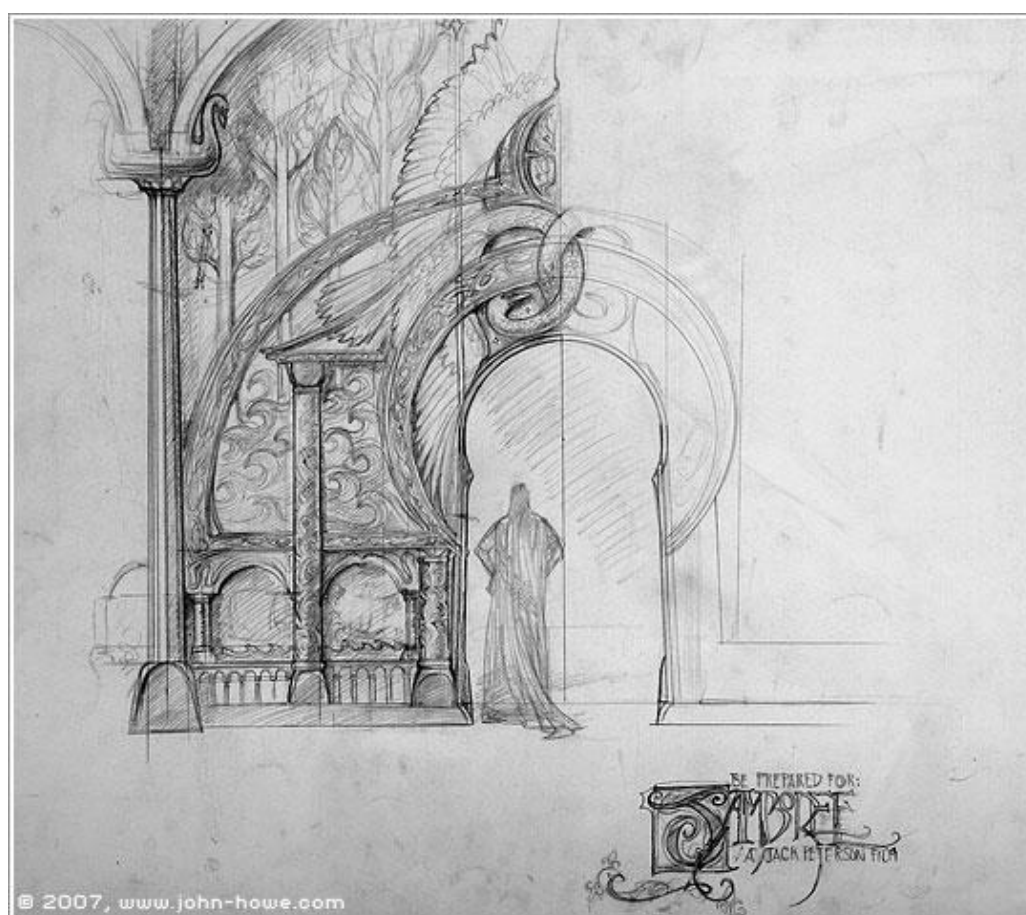


Figure 41– John Howe, *Rivendell*, Sketch 2007 (Howe, 2018)



## Immersion

In Mark J.P. Wolf's theory of immersion, he differentiates between three types: physical, sensual, and conceptual immersion. He explains that "conceptual immersion, which relies on the user's imagination; for example, engaging books like *The Lord of the Rings* are considered "immersive" if they supply sufficient detail and description for the reader to vicariously enter the imagined World." (Wolf, 2013, p. 48) With that, he explains that Tolkien's stories are immersive because the level of detail he includes brings Middle Earth to life through the reader's imagination. His landscapes feel real, and his Worldbuilding provides the depth necessary for conceptual immersion, which depends on the mental engagement of the reader. Through this engagement, the reader becomes fully absorbed in the World, mentally exploring its complexities and feeling emotionally connected.

In a visual medium like TV, this type of immersion would translate to a visual immersion, where the set design and locations are essential in shaping what the viewer feels and imagines. A well-designed world on screen can evoke a similar sense of connection, allowing the viewer to emotionally experience the setting much like a reader would with Tolkien's detailed descriptions.

Another point is invention Wolf talks about: "In order for a world to be taken seriously, audiences have to be able to relate to a world and its inhabitants, comparing their situations to similar ones in the Primary World." (Wolf, 2013, p. 37)

Sometimes, our emotions and connections to a place deeply influence how we experience it. Rivendell feels homely because it reminds me of Switzerland, my home. This sense of comfort is also present for viewers of *The Rings of Power*. For those familiar with Rivendell from *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Hobbit*, the sight of the untouched valley taps into nostalgic memories of a place where characters find solace and refuge, making it feel like an emotional sanctuary, especially in contrast to the events that came before, such as Galadriel's near-death and the downfall of Eregion.

In *The Rings of Power*, the show never officially names the location as Rivendell, because they do not have to. Through the distinctive features like the flowing river, the waterfalls, tall mountains and the protected valley, viewers immediately recognize it. This pre-existing connection to Rivendell keeps the viewers immersed as it strengthens its emotional connection.

Rivendell's location design in *The Rings of Power* reflects Tolkien's personal experiences and inspirations, his main inspiration being Switzerland. There is no better example of this than the blend of nature and architecture in Tolkien's illustrations and the production design adaptations of his work. By incorporating geographic and cultural references that viewers are familiar with, such as those from nature, into the design of a location or a set, viewers are more likely to relate to and fully immerse themselves, as in Wolf's theory. The visual storytelling comes to life this way, inviting readers to imagine this magical place without it being named or even built.

## Conclusion

This exploration of a new adaptation of Tolkien's world led me down many different paths, not just through Middle earth but also through history, mythology, art, and my own experiences.

I analysed four different places in Arda connected to the Elves, each explored through a specific aspect of Mark Wolf's worldbuilding theories. With each, I investigated the past, what was there before, what might have inspired new visual choices, and how elements from mythology, language, and history shape our understanding of Tolkien's world.

For Valinor, I explored how subcreation brings depth to Tolkien's world, making it feel real by grounding it in mythology and language as its foundation. This chapter ended up demonstrating how the way Tolkien used to create his world, and how the creators of Rings of power did the same. This showed me how the production designers carefully referenced the blending of Tolkien's secondary world with elements from the primary world, such as mythological references to places like Tír na nÓg. This shows they researched Tolkien's way of worldbuilding and tried to continue it in their own way.

For Lindon, I explored how Tolkien's personal experiences, especially his deep love for trees and nature, shaped not only his writing but also the visual portrayal of the Elves and their surroundings. Using Mark Wolf's theory of invention completeness, I showed how these new visual elements fit into the established world, helping them blend in while expanding its scope. This lets the production designers bring in innovative ideas without breaking the continuity of Tolkien's world, strengthening Lindon's identity as an Elven haven.

This connection is especially strong in the golden trees and organic architecture used in the production design, which reflect the Elves' relationship with their surroundings and Tolkien's. One striking example is the dying tree, which, although not part of Tolkien's original texts, feels fitting within this world.



In Eregion, I examined art history and its connection to Mark Wolf's concept of cultural reflection, showing how artistic influences continue to shape how we interpret fantasy worlds. One of the most fascinating aspects of art history for me is how artists constantly build on the work of those who came before them. This process of reinterpretation and adaptation is visible everywhere; there are always art historical references if you take the time to analyse a picture or a set. In this chapter, I wanted to demonstrate how quickly these connections can be found. The visual design of Eregion draws heavily on Renaissance architecture and Art Deco elements, blending them into something new while still echoing the familiar. Even viewers who are not consciously analysing these visuals often sense that connection, recognizing shapes, patterns, and symbols that reflect our own world. When I saw the design of Eregion's town square, I could not help but think of the Piazza del Campidoglio. I am not certain it was the direct inspiration, but that is the power of cultural reflection; it invites viewers to draw these connections for themselves, grounding even the most fantastical worlds in something real. This chapter demonstrates how the production design of Eregion succeeds because it is filled with visual clues about its creation. The love Celebrimbor poured into building the city is reflected in every detail. When we witness its destruction, it is not just painful because beloved characters die; it is heartbreaking because the city itself falls.

In chapter 4, about Rivendell, I demonstrated how familiarity and personal experience play a significant role in creating immersion. For me it is not just a place in Middle earth; it is tied to my connection with Switzerland. Its cliffs, waterfalls, and forests remind me of the landscapes I grew up with. As Mark Wolf highlights in his theories on worldbuilding, immersion is essential for making a fictional world feel real. This chapter demonstrated how familiarity and personal experience play a significant role in creating immersion. It shows that immersion is not only about visual accuracy but also about how a place makes you feel and how it triggers memories or if it can make you feel safe.

## **Critiques**

One of the main critiques aimed at *The Rings of Power* is that its world looks too polished, too 'costumey' and clean compared to Peter Jackson's adaptations. While

that criticism might seem valid at first, it overlooks the fact that this story is set in the Second Age, a very different period from the Third Age depicted in *The Lord of the Rings*. This is not a world on the brink of collapse but one at the height of its glory. From the very first scene in Valinor, where a young Galadriel floats a delicate paper swan on a calm river, it is clear that this world is meant to feel different. Valinor feels far removed from *The Lord of the Rings* timeline, not only in distance but in time.

Eregion shows another example. In *The Lord of the Rings*, it exists only as Ruins and a distant memory of what once was. But in *The Rings of Power*, we see Eregion at its peak, a thriving city of creativity and collaboration, filled with developed architecture. The polished look of the series is not just a creative choice; it is a reflection of the age it represents. The show's production designer, Ramsey Avery, explained that "it was very important to differentiate the Second Age from the Third Age. The Third Age is about decay and decline, but the Second Age is glorious. We're looking at different cultures at the height of their capacities and capabilities." (Ramsey in Jones, 2023) This makes a clear statement that this is meant to look different from what we know.

In the Grey Havens, for instance, the port is depicted as calm and minimalist in *The Rings of Power* which symbolises a time with no rush to build ships en masse. In contrast, in *The Return of the King*, the Grey Havens is larger and more built-up, a functional space designed for the mass departure of the Elves from Middle earth. This change in style emphasizes the importance of the Second Age and its reign, adding weight to the fall of these once great civilizations.

## **Final Thoughts**

As I reach the end of this exploration, I can confidently say that the production design and world-building in *The Rings of Power* is remarkably well done. The series creates a consistent and immersive world with thoughtful design, cultural influences, and meaningful visual references. They build on the work of artists such as Alan Lee, John Howe, and Ted Nasmith, staying true to tradition while offering viewers something new. Like taking creative risks, expanding Middle-earth's

aesthetic in ways that feel fitting for the story of the Second Age. This blend of deep respect for the past and thoughtful innovation helps *The Rings of Power* stand on its own while still feeling like part of Tolkien's world.

Looking to the future, Middle earth will continue to grow and evolve in different mediums. And the challenge will always be balancing innovative ideas with staying true to the original. Just as every re-reading of Tolkien reveals new layers, each adaptation provides a different lens through which to experience Middle-earth over and over again.

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