

Rodney Matthews

Rodney Matthews has been described by John Cleese as belonging "among the greatest artists that have ever lived". His distinct style has won him a strong following, and he has illustrated Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Lewis Carroll, Kenneth Grahame and other classic writers. As designer-illustrator he has created book and record album covers (for Magnum, Thin Lizzy, Nazareth, Barclay James Harvest, Rick Wakeman and others). He has also created video games, and television series, such as Gerry Anderson's production of Lavender Castle, and worked closely with fantasy author Michael Moorcock (Elric at the End of Time). Rodney's notecards, postcards, jigsaw puzzles, collector's cards, and poster prints have sold worldwide in their millions. His work is collected in Last Ship Home, In Search of Forever, and Countdown to Millennium. Born in Somerset, England, Rodney has made his home in North Wales for many years. His originals have been displayed at the leading Chris Beetles Gallery in London's West End, and his one-man shows have been featured in the Langton Gallery, London, in Sierre, Switzerland, and in Cardiff and Machynlleth, Wales.



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The Nine Set Out

My interest in illustrating J.R.R. Tolkien can be traced back to the early 70's, when, trapped in a rain lashed hotel overlooking the cliffs of Druidston Haven in Pembrokeshire, I stumbled across a dog-eared copy of *The Hobbit*, which looked like it had been used as a doorstop and ashtray as well as showing distinct signs of continued fingering. I knew that *The Hobbit* preceded the 'hippies' bible 'The Lord of the Rings' because the same had been the subject of heated discussion many times by the members of my band Squidd during long boring journeys to gigs in the old 'group van'.

I had not read the Rings and had not intended to, but here was this *Hobbit* on a wet day – I succumbed and was instantly hooked! My first effort at illustrating Tolkien took the form of four test pieces in line and ink wash, I also did the battle of the five armies from the *Hobbit*, but somehow this has been lost. The Nine Set Out is one of a series of paintings I did around the year 2000, it was commissioned by Independent Posters UK. The scene is well known to Tolkien fans, being the departure of the Fellowship of the Ring (and donkey) from Rivendell.



Old Man Willow

It was the work of my favourite book illustrator Arthur Rackham that illuminated me to the possibility of depicting trees with faces and human characteristics. I have used this fairy tale principal many times in my work including some malevolent trees as concept drawings for the Magic Roundabout movie (these were eventually deemed too frightening for the expected children's audience, and deleted!). What a load of cobblers, I thought; kids love that sort of thing!

It was a real pleasure to apply myself to illustrating, first Treebeard (commissioned for a book by the Woodland Trust), which sold at the Chris Beetles Gallery in 1990, and later Old Man Willow. The scene, notable for being left out of the Peter Jackson movie, features the mischievous old willow, just on the point of attempting to grip a *Hobbit*! Living and working in North Wales, I have never been short of references for gnarled trees, moss and marshy settings, although *Hobbits* are retiring and difficult to catch!





Mirador

Mirador (1981) is one of my best known images, having been used in many formats including posters, calendars, cards, T-shirts and most notably the cover of the 1987 album of the same name by Magnum.

I remember being impressed by photographs of the windswept peaks of the Himalayas some of which were taken from above cloud level, seeming to be at the very roof of the world. The Ice Palace in the background is the source of the picture's title, Mirador – a belvedere turret, or gallery, commanding an extensive view (according to the New English Dictionary). The Little family of Elk-like creatures are well adapted for life above the clouds, as are the clumps of bristle cone pine – the world's oldest living thing. The jagged snow shapes are taken from my own stash of photographs. Fantasy art and Rock 'n' Roll – it's my life!

lonawr

This was painted a few years ago as a commission from my Mother-in-law who is particularly fond of ducks, and regularly feeds the multitude of wild ducks congregating around her house and garden near a river in Somerset.



The ducks are mostly based upon the Eider duck with perhaps also a little of the Pintail, and the vegetation, a type of exaggerated holly. In the background is a kind of Norse meeting house, which also appeared in my 2009 painting 'Time Winds'. Some of you will know that lonawr is the Welsh word for January.

At the March Hares Table

Currently a topical subject with the recent release of Tim Burton's Alice movie, this iconic scene is well known as the tea party fiasco featuring Alice with the March Hare, the Mad Hatter and the Dormouse.

It was painted in 1990 as part of a commission from Cartouche Fine Art, Bristol for a series of four limited editions. Others in the series were 'On the Croquet Ground', 'Painting the Roses', and 'The Knave on Trial'. All originals were exhibited at Britain's foremost illustration gallery, The Chris Beetles Gallery in London's West End, on the occasion of the end of year illustrators show 1991.

Three of the originals sold – two to none other than John Cleese, who has since become a very good customer. Recently, these Alice paintings were included with many others in my illustrated book 'Alice in Wonderland' published by Templar Publishing.



Immortal

Bob Catley, the vocalist for the Birmingham rock band Magnum, asked me to design the cover of his solo album 'Immortal', to be written and produced by the Swedish guitar wizard Magnus Karlsson and distributed by the Italian record company Frontiers.

I was asked for something epic, with a sword swinging eternal hero, not unlike Michael Moorcock's Elric, known as the Eternal Champion. The design has a typical record cover layout that invariably falls into a left and right feature for front and back. Immortal has been printed as an open edition giclee print, signed.

Twice Upon A Time

The origin of this piece goes back to 1972, although the picture was painted in 2003 for the cover of a music CD featuring three previously long lost tracks by my band Squidd.

The painting reflects the titles of the songs, - Lavender Castle (the castle floating in the sky), The Sorcerer's Apprentice (the teardrop planet, like a sorcerer's hat) and twice upon a time (the revisiting of this project). Squidd was a first generation progressive rock band that disbanded in 1974, just as my art began to take precedence over my music – well drumming – it's almost music! In 1996 the song Lavender Castle became the subconscious influence for my 26 episode children's stop motion animated series of the same name produced by Gerry Anderson. This image had also appeared as the front cover of my calendar for 2004 and has been printed as a limited edition.