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presents

The Roots of Fantasy



A 4x26' documentary series
Directed by Yannis & Alexis Metzinger
and Stéphan Roelants

SUMMARY

John Howe, the conceptual designer of Peter Jackson's trilogies, and concept artist of the Amazon series *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*, takes us on a wonderful journey to discover the artists who have crafted fantasy, in literature and illustration.

Each episode sees John meet with one the greatest contemporary fantasy artists, as animated sequences breathe life into their iconic work.

- - Episode 1: The Brothers Grimm: Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1786-1859)
- - Episode 2: William Morris (1834-1896)
- - Episode 3: H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937)
- - Episode 4: Robert E. Howard (1906-1937)

OVERVIEW

Fantasy is all around us. In movies, literature, as well as video and role-playing games. But what crucible was it forged in? What are its founding works? And what can these roots tell us about the place Fantasy holds in our society?

Illustrator John Howe is one of the masters of contemporary fantasy. His breathtaking visual universe and the depth of his erudition have elevated his renown far beyond the circle of discerning fantasy fans. In his quest for the answer to these questions, he delved into the roots of fantasy.

From its distant origins in myths and legends to its emergence into popular culture in the second half of the 20th century, fantasy has gradually taken shape over a history spanning more than a century. From the romantic Germany of the Brothers Grimm to the Texas plains where Robert E. Howard gave birth to the character of Conan, from the socialist utopias of William Morris to the tortured and eccentric mind of HP Lovecraft, John Howe's travels will be interspersed with animated sequences breathing life into the stories that laid the foundations of the genre.

To understand what makes these works so relevant and prevalent today, John Howe will be assisted by renowned experts such as S. T. Joshi, author of a 1200-page biography of Lovecraft, and Patrice Louinet, editor and translator of Robert E. Howard. John Howe will also meet with great contemporary authors such as the director Terry Gilliam or the illustrator Mike Mignola, creator of Hellboy and designer of Batman. For them, going back to these roots is instrumental to renew their inspiration and create the Fantasy of tomorrow.





NOTE OF INTENT

Over the past twenty years, our views on Fantasy have shifted tremendously. Long reduced to repetitive adventures in comic books or movies with kitschy settings and poor scenarios, Fantasy now faces higher expectations from readers and critics alike, who demand complex heroes, strong female characters, original universes, in tune with more modern issues. This demand also affects the way we look back at past works.

But what we find out thanks to this series is that, at its roots, Fantasy was all about offering a complex vision of the world, sometimes even politically committed. That is how we have learned that William Morris is the most feminist Fantasy writer until the 70s, and that the Conan conceived by Robert

E. Howard is far removed from the manly and simplistic macho that he was later reduced to. These stereotypes developed afterwards, often under the pen of unscrupulous imitators, when companies tried cashing in on the growing demand for Fantasy from young readers and broader audiences.

And this subject is all the more topical because these discoveries are still very recent. It has only been ten years since academics – often fans themselves – have started studying Fantasy seriously. And logically, their investigation of the genre's roots was followed by an investigation of the roots of the works themselves. Like archaeologists, they have unearthed manuscripts and reedited texts that were lost to time.

A new light has thus been shed on these works: not only do they showcase an art of storytelling that is much more creative than their adaptations might have led us to believe, but these imaginary worlds, far from being reduced to mere entertainment, are also in keeping with the spirit of their time – whether they act as a pamphlet against sclerotic Victorian society for William Morris, or embody the typically American hero in the era of the Great Depression for Robert E. Howard.

A photograph of a man with a grey beard and glasses, wearing a dark jacket, sitting on a rocky shore. He is holding a large open sketchbook and a pen, appearing to be sketching. In the background, there is a lighthouse on a grassy hill under a blue sky with some clouds. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

NOTE FROM JOHN HOWE

I first discovered fantasy in the dark aisles of used bookstores, where a friend and I spent hours looking for covers by artists we admired. It was a relentless hunt for, sometimes musty, treasure. And from it, we got a large collection of fantasy paperbacks where only the cover mattered – mostly by American artist Frank Frazetta. Naturally, I ended up reading the books themselves, and thus entered the universe of Robert E. Howard, Conan's creator (I still have the covers, if not the books themselves).

Nearly four decades of artistic production in this field have taught me that if an image catches my eye, then it is due to more than superficial cosmetic interest. It resonates with something much deeper. And I know that if I look more closely, I will discover layer upon layer of historical and cultural significance. Fantasy may have an immediate, mass appeal; but in no way does that preclude more substance and complexity, on a deeper level. Fantasy literature and art deserve a second look.

One particular aspect of fantasy that stands out to me is the journey across worlds and encounters with extraordinary beings. Through the *Roots of Fantasy*, we can embark on a journey to meet the individuals who have helped shape modern fantasy. We will meet not only the creators of these fantasy worlds, but also those who complement them so well: the artists who helped materialize the vision of the authors, whose stories they illustrated... This is an exploration of the persistence of vision and the intimate relationship between imago and logos.

THE ANIMATION



This series is co-produced by Mélusine Productions, which has won several awards and been nominated for an Oscar. It handled the artistic and technical direction of the 6 to 8 minutes of animation in each episode, which illustrate a story by the authors involved. These animated sequences intersperse each episode and adopt, for each story, a style in line with the period and the author's pictorial references:

For *The Two Brothers*, about the Brothers Grimm, a graphic design inspired by shadow puppets will create a romantic and elegant style, capable of quickly turning into a darker universe.

The Water of the Wondrous Isles, about William Morris, will pay homage to the Pre-Raphaelite painters' works, with their rich colors and lines reminiscent of Gothic illuminations.

With *The Call of Cthulhu*, about H.P. Lovecraft, the universe will be closer to film noir, with a more realistic graphic design, from which the fantastic will emerge with the appearance of Cthulhu.

The visual identity of *Beyond the Black River*, about Robert E. Howard, will pay tribute to comic books and comics in general.



The Two Brothers (Brothers Grimm)



Beyond the Black River (Robert E. Howard)



The Call of Cthulhu (H.P. Lovecraft)



The Water of the Wondrous Isles (William Morris)

CERIGO FILMS



Lovecraft, by Mike Mignola

MELUSINE
PRODUCTIONS



Conan, by Barry Windsor-Smith

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