

# *Tolkien 1A*

## *Myth Transformed in Late Capitalism*

by Arslohgo



Arslohgo, "Tolkien 1A", Digital composite, 4961 × 3508 pixels, CMYK, 300 DPI.

*Arslohgo's "Tolkien 1A" confronts us with a disturbing fusion of two seemingly incompatible worlds: the mythic-archaic realm of Middle-earth and the hypermodern reality of Manhattan. This digital collage operates as a visual palimpsest where an Orc's silhouette—that creature from Tolkien's dark imagination—rises spectrally over New York's nighttime skyline while penetrating the fragmented text "NEWY."*

### *The City Becomes Orc*

The work's central visual mechanism lies in its double encoding: the Orc and the typographic intervention "NEWY" merge into a cipher for "New York," with the creature itself becoming a living letter, a signifier made flesh. This transformation evokes Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of*

Enlightenment—the return of the repressed, the barbaric, at the heart of modern civilization. The Orc, Tolkien’s symbol of corrupted creation and industrialized violence, materializes here as a revenant in the center of global capitalism.

### *Monochrome Apocalypse*

The deliberate reduction to grayscale intensifies the composition’s atmospheric density. This chromatic austerity recalls film noir’s visual strategies, yet transforms their existential paranoia into a posthuman eschatology. The oversized moon—or is it an extinguished sun?—bathes the scene in crepuscular light that marks neither day nor night but a liminal state of eternal twilight.

### *Tolkien’s Prophet in the Digital Age*

The title’s reference to Tolkien opens multiple layers of meaning. Tolkien’s mythology, created in response to World War I’s traumas and industrial alienation, becomes here a lens for critiquing our digitized present. The Orcs—perverted Elves in Tolkien’s cosmos, tortured and disfigured by Morgoth’s industrial cruelty—become in Arslough’s work an allegory for urban deformation. New York, once symbol of the American Dream, mutates into an Orcish dystopia populated by neoliberalism’s disfigured subjects.

### *The Monster’s Transparency*

particularly significant is the translucent quality of the Orc’s face, through which the city’s architecture shimmers. This permeability suggests an ontological indeterminacy—is the city possessed by the monster, or is the monster a projection of the city itself? This ambiguity recalls Žižek’s concept of the “symptom”: the Orc functions as New York’s traumatic symptom, the return of the repressed Other that ruptures the metropolis’s smooth surface.

### *Typographic Terrorism*

The fragmented text “NEWY” practices a form of typographic vandalism. The amputation of “ORK” from “NEW YORK” is compensated by the Orc’s presence itself—a visual pun that confronts the arbitrariness of linguistic signs with the materiality of monstrous bodies. This strategy recalls William S. Burroughs’s cut-up techniques, transformed into the digital realm: the Orc as living virus infecting the city’s semiotic order.

### *Return of the Repressed*

Arslough mobilizes Tolkien’s mythological arsenal not as escapist fantasy but as diagnostic tool for deciphering urban pathologies. The fusion of Orc and metropolis becomes a visual thesis about the barbarism nesting at civilization’s heart—a barbarism that does not come from outside but emerges from the city’s own structures.

The work positions itself within the tradition of critical appropriation art that repurposes pop culture icons for social analysis. Where Warhol affirmatively doubled consumer culture’s surfaces, Arslough

practices a form of digital necromancy: resurrecting dead myths as mirrors for living nightmares. “Tolkien 1A” is less homage to the British philologist than dark prophecy—the vision of a world where we have all become Orcs, transparent yet impenetrable, simultaneously monsters and victims in the ruins of our own creation.

*NEWY: the word amputated so that the Orc may complete it. NEW Y—new why—the question hanging over the skyline. Tolkien wrote his myths against industrial violence. Arslough writes them back into it, and the monster’s face, transparent as glass, shows the city looking through.*

Medium: Digital Collage