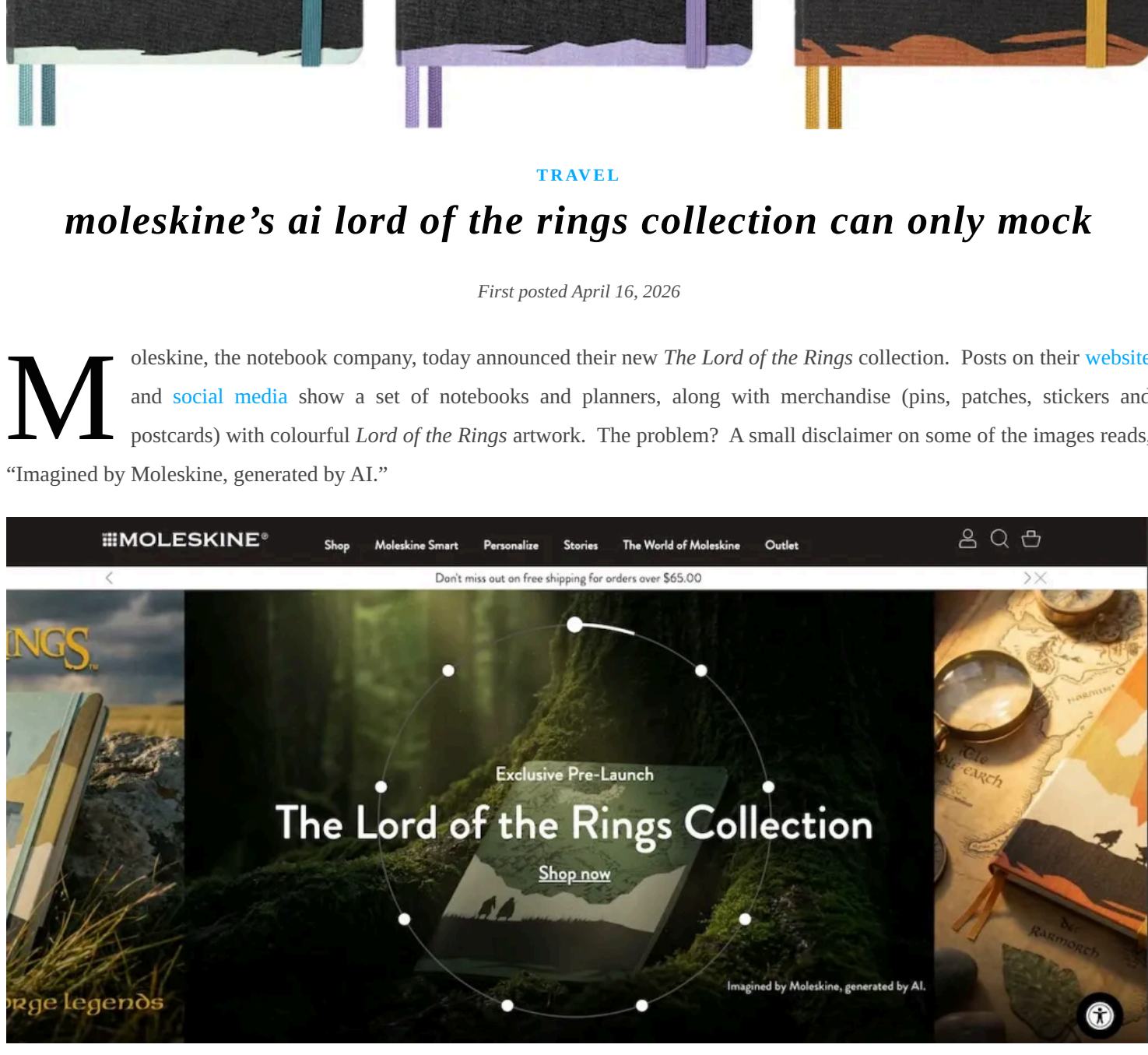


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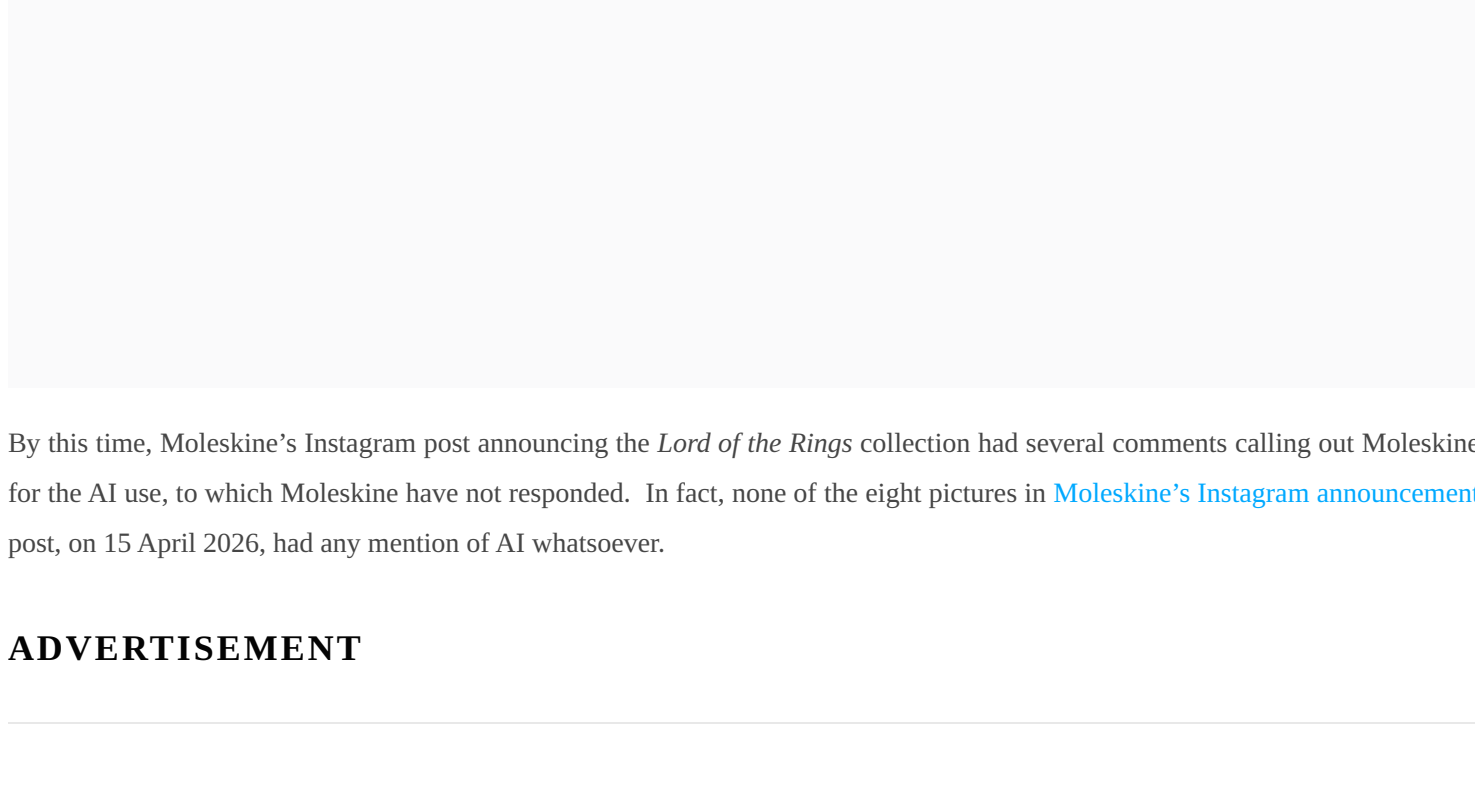


TRAVEL

## moleskine's ai lord of the rings collection can only mock

First posted April 16, 2026

Moleskine, the notebook company, today announced their new *The Lord of the Rings* collection. Posts on their [website](#) and [social media](#) show a set of notebooks and planners, along with merchandise (pins, patches, stickers and postcards) with colourful *Lord of the Rings* artwork. The problem? A small disclaimer on some of the images reads, "Imagined by Moleskine, generated by AI."



I have used Moleskine notebooks for years, since the days when the brand claimed that their legendary notebooks were once used by luminaries such as Ernest Hemingway and Pablo Picasso. Nowadays, they have tempered their statement to only acknowledge the claim without committing to it, a marketing strategy that they appear to continue using in the current AI controversy.

*"The Moleskine notebook is the heir and successor to the legendary notebook used by artists and thinkers over the past two centuries: among them Vincent Van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway and Bruce Chatwin."*  
— "Our Heritage: The Legendary Notebook" on Moleskine's website

Still, the word "legendary" appears on their website in abundance: from "legendary deals" to "legendary collection."

### ADVERTISEMENT

I am also a big *Lord of the Rings* fan, so this collection immediately caught my eye. This morning, I saved the post on Instagram to make sure to take a look when I got home. But when I finally had the chance to browse the collection on the Moleskine website, something held me back from placing an order. It was hard to put my finger on it at first, but then, in the corner of a promotional image on the website, I saw the AI disclaimer.



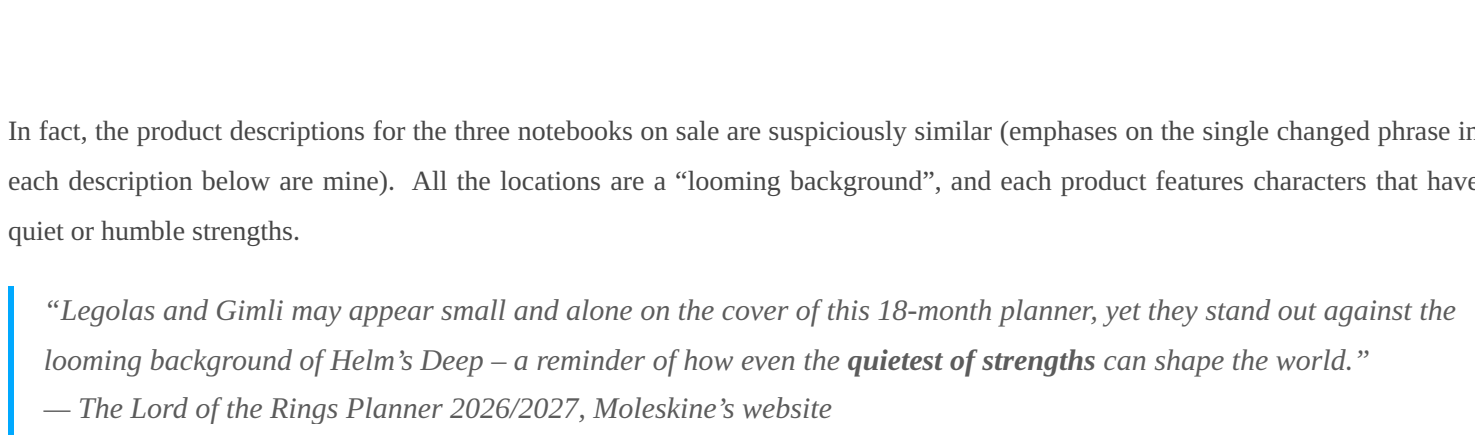
By this time, Moleskine's Instagram post announcing the *Lord of the Rings* collection had several comments calling out Moleskine for the AI use, to which Moleskine have not responded. In fact, none of the eight pictures in [Moleskine's Instagram announcement](#) post, on 15 April 2026, had any mention of AI whatsoever.

### ADVERTISEMENT

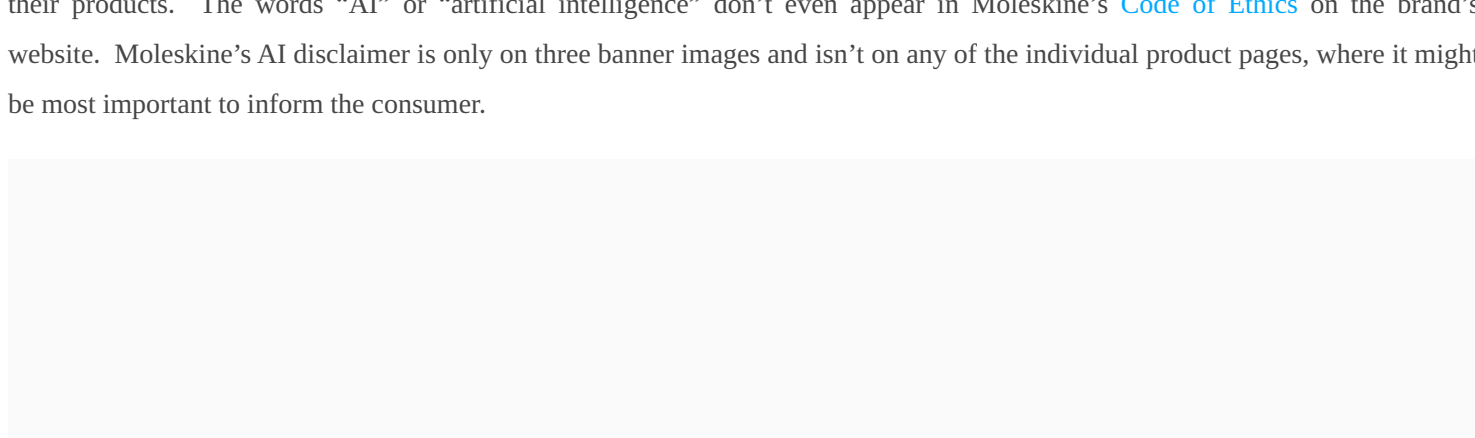
There are no details about which parts of the product are AI, or how AI was used. There aren't even any clues that one could have picked out in the earlier days of AI. And this is a legitimate collaboration, with *The Lord of the Rings* logo and trademark stamped on the products.



The art in Moleskine's *The Lord of the Rings* collection has a flat, minimalist style that doesn't have noisy pixels or anatomical anomalies. The designs of Helm's Deep and Gondor are generic and lack details. Everything in the cover images is done in block colours and silhouettes. On one hand, this is a solid strategy to hide that a piece of artwork was AI-generated. On the other, there are artists out there who do use this sort of style in their legitimate, human-made artwork.



And that's the problem: we cannot tell the difference. Without the "generated by AI" note, there might be no way to tell if the art in Moleskine's notebook collection is AI. As of writing, Moleskine have not admitted to using AI in these cover designs, but they also have not credited an artist or provided any proof of human creation. Given that previous limited-edition collections have often been [collaborations with artists and designers](#) that Moleskine have proudly featured front and centre in their promotional material, this is troubling.



Moleskine's "3 Artists, 3 Countries" collection in 2024 featured designs by Zeng Fanzhi, Ahn Sang Soo and Momoko Sakura.

It's even more disturbing because the Moleskine brand appeals to creatives and seems to place importance on championing creativity.

*"Inspired by The Lord of the Rings, this collection reminds us that even when we feel small in a vast world, each of us has creative talents that help us persevere. By putting pen to paper, you can find clarity as you explore your own unique imagination. The way forward is at the tip of your pen."*  
— The blurb beneath each of *The Lord of the Rings* products on Moleskine's website

### ADVERTISEMENT

In fact, the product descriptions for the three notebooks on sale are suspiciously similar (emphases on the single changed phrase in each description below are mine). All the locations are a "looming background", and each product features characters that have quiet or humble strengths.

*"Legolas and Gimli may appear small and alone on the cover of this 18-month planner, yet they stand out against the looming background of Helm's Deep – a reminder of how even the quietest of strengths can shape the world."*  
— *The Lord of the Rings Planner 2026/2027*, Moleskine's website

*"Aragorn may appear small and alone on the cover of this notebook, yet he stands out against the looming background of the city of Gondor – a reminder of how even the quietest individual strengths can shape the world."*  
— *The Lord of the Rings Notebook*, Moleskine's website

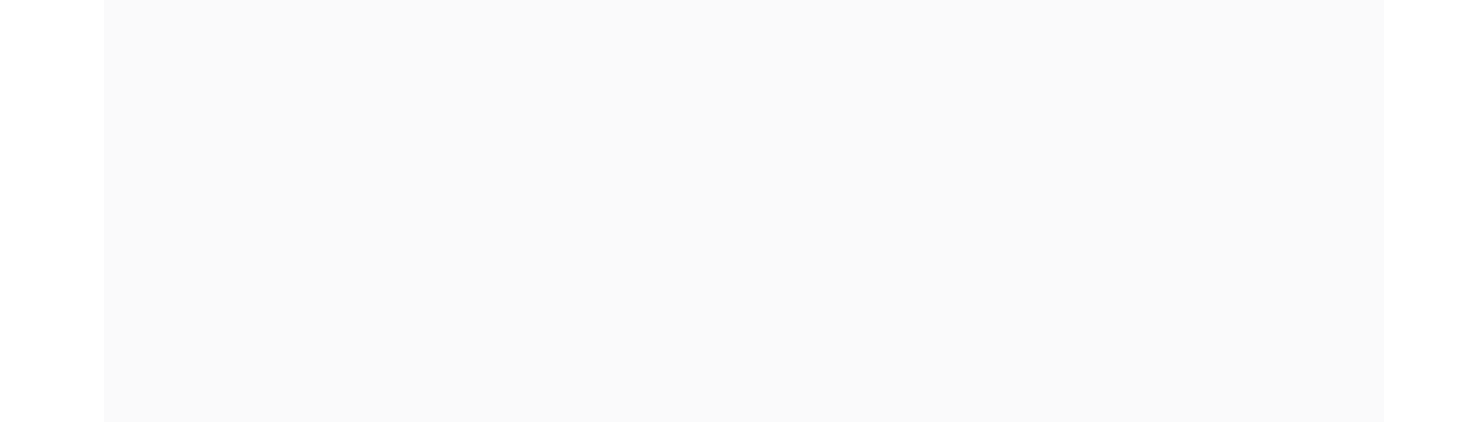
*"Frodo and Sam may appear small and alone on the cover of this notebook, yet they stand out against the looming background of Mordor – a reminder of how even the humblest of strengths can shape the world."*  
— *The Lord of the Rings Notebook*, Moleskine's website

### ADVERTISEMENT

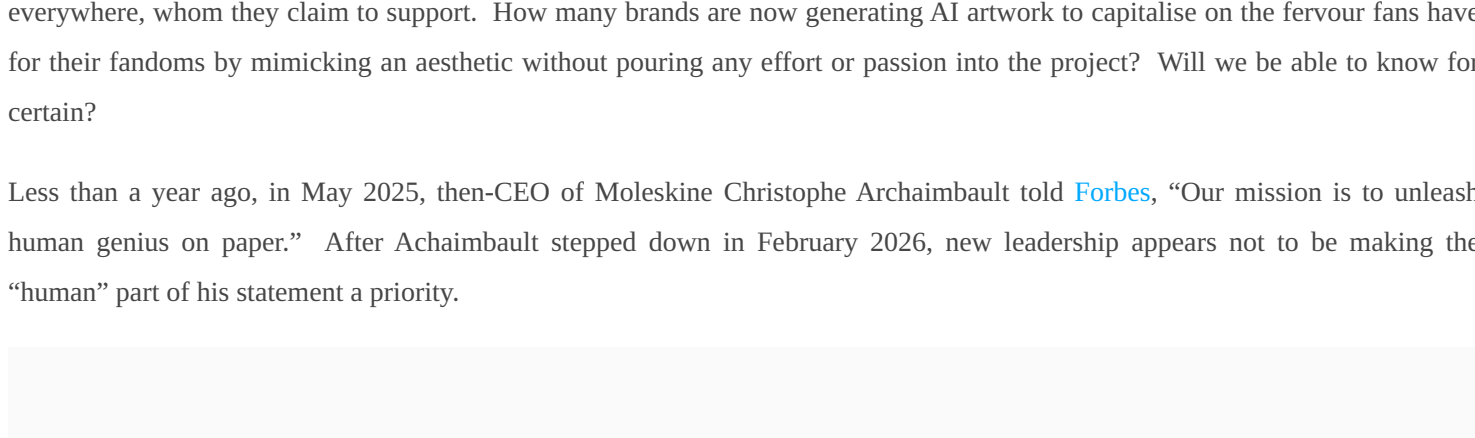
Currently, there are no regulations on AI use in products for sale. There are no requirements that a company declare AI art use in their products. The words "AI" or "artificial intelligence" don't even appear in Moleskine's [Code of Ethics](#) on the brand's website. Moleskine's AI disclaimer is only on three banner images and isn't on any of the individual product pages, where it might be most important to inform the consumer.



One thing *Lord of the Rings* fans should be pretty certain about, AI was used in the promotional material. The last of eight images posted to Instagram by Moleskine in the announcement of *The Lord of the Rings* collection features a map in the iconic Tolkien style. But the map shows nonsensical locations like "Der Rarmorth" and "Narmimtz".



Another map in the background of a banner on the Moleskine website shows other gibberish names of places that don't exist in Middle-earth. This also shows an inconsistency in Moleskine's labelling of AI, if in good faith: the first map was not marked with the AI disclaimer, but the second was.



There is also this notebook that features a map, which is included in the Instagram post but is nowhere to be found on the website. The map is too blurry to make out properly, but the geography looks inconsistent with other maps of Middle-earth.

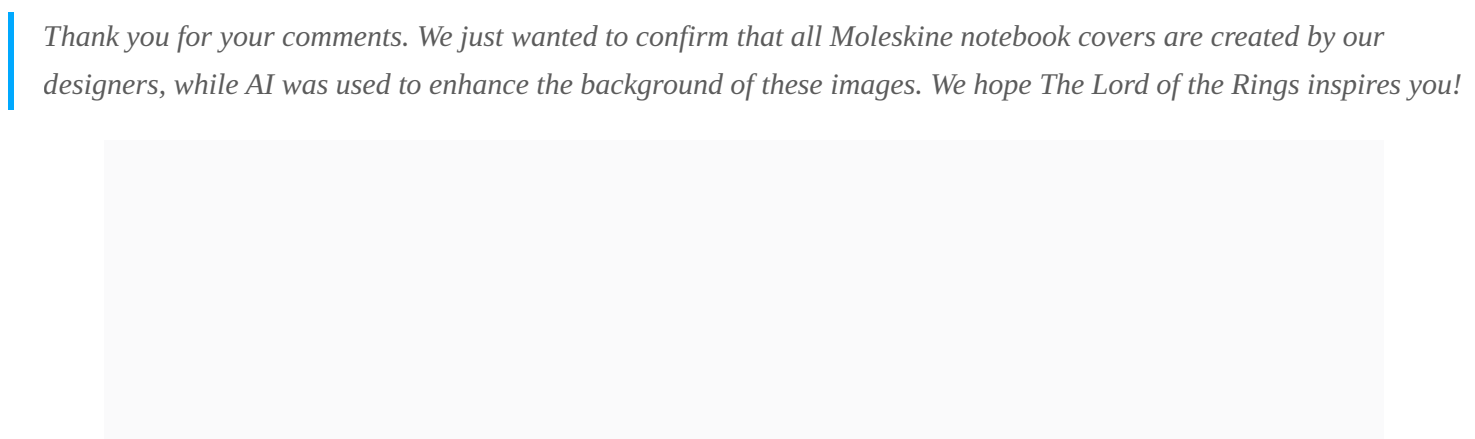


How did these maps slip through? One would hope that someone who even tangentially knew *The Lord of the Rings* would be on the team designing and approving the ads for this campaign.

### ADVERTISEMENT

Therein lies Moleskine's mockery, not only of fans of *The Lord of the Rings*, but also of their own customers and creative humans everywhere, whom they claim to support. How many brands are now generating AI artwork to capitalise on the fervour fans have for their fandoms by mimicking an aesthetic without pouring any effort or passion into the project? Will we be able to know for certain?

Less than a year ago, in May 2025, then-CEO of Moleskine Christophe Archaimbault told [Forbes](#), "Our mission is to unleash human genius on paper." After Archaimbault stepped down in February 2026, new leadership appears not to be making the "human" part of his statement a priority.



Moleskine's [Manifesto](#), found on their website.

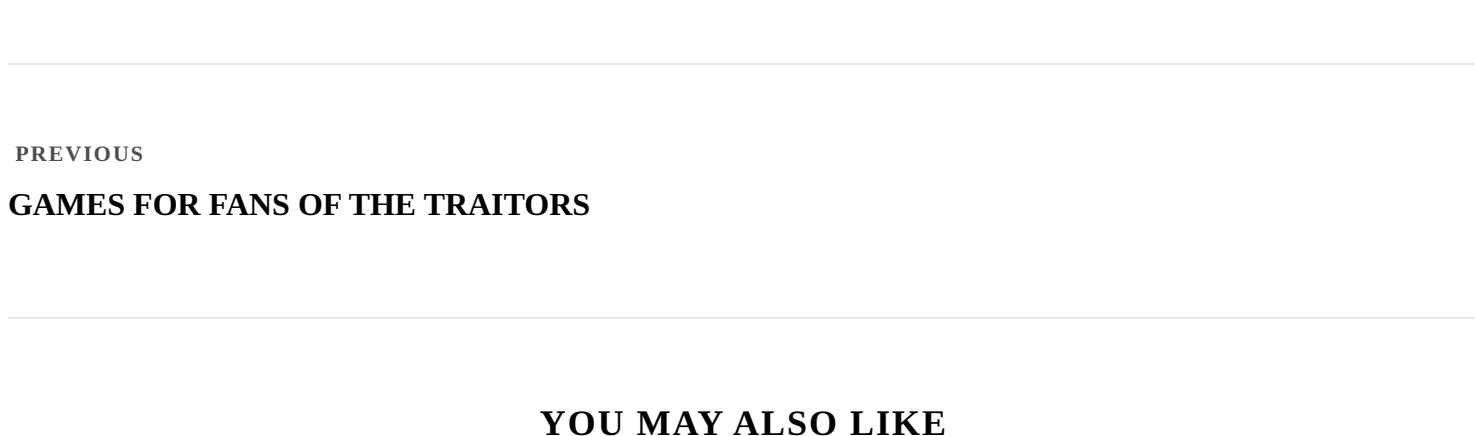
Still, in their [Manifesto](#), Moleskine extol the "timeless power of handwriting" before ending with a pithy encouragement to "put pen to paper, and unleash your unique voice." Generative AI cannot be unique, as it uses, often without permission, the artwork of human artists.

*"The Shadow that bred [the orcs] can only mock, it cannot make: not real new things of its own."*  
— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*

As of writing, Moleskine have not made a statement about their AI use in this collection.

In the meantime, does anyone have recommendations for a good notebook?

### ADVERTISEMENT



## Updates

17 April 2026

Moleskine posted a comment on their Instagram post announcing *The Lord of the Rings* collection on 17 April 2026.

*"Thank you for your comments. We just wanted to confirm that all Moleskine notebook covers are created by our designers, while AI was used to enhance the background of these images. We hope The Lord of the Rings inspires you!"*



This statement, which is only on Moleskine's Instagram and not on their official website, claims that the notebook covers were created by designers, and AI was used for the backgrounds of the promotional images.

However, it is not an apology for using AI, and Moleskine have not removed the AI-generated images from their social media or their website. It is also not a fully transparent statement that the cover designs were created by the designers without the use of AI. Moleskine have not provided evidence of completely human-made artwork for the covers or named the designers who worked on them.

Moleskine's use of AI even in promotional images, and their lack of accountability and corrective action in response to the concerns of human artists and the creatives who use their product, shows a shocking misunderstanding of their own brand and a disrespect for the brands it collaborates with, such as *The Lord of the Rings* and its fandom.

### ADVERTISEMENT



25 April 2026

Moleskine have removed the "Imagined by Moleskine, generated by AI" disclaimer on all images on their website. The AI-generated promotional images continue to exist on their website, without the disclaimer. Considering they have already admitted to using AI in these images on Instagram, it's a baffling move to become less transparent on their website.

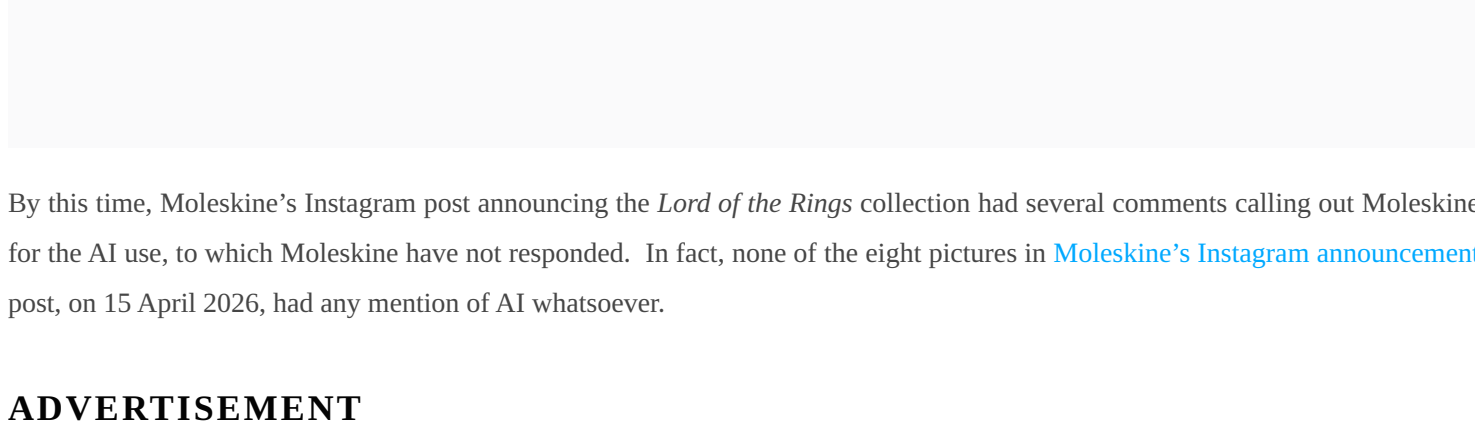
This doubling down is insulting to creatives, their main customer base, and fans of *The Lord of the Rings*, in a clear attempt to hide the fact that they have used AI in those promotional images, particularly from those who have not seen their statement on social media.

*The Lord of the Rings* Moleskine collection remains on sale to members, with the \$175 3-book collection already sold out. Moleskine have not confirmed that the notebook covers, some of which contain the uncanny maps, were created by human designers without the use of AI in any part of the process.

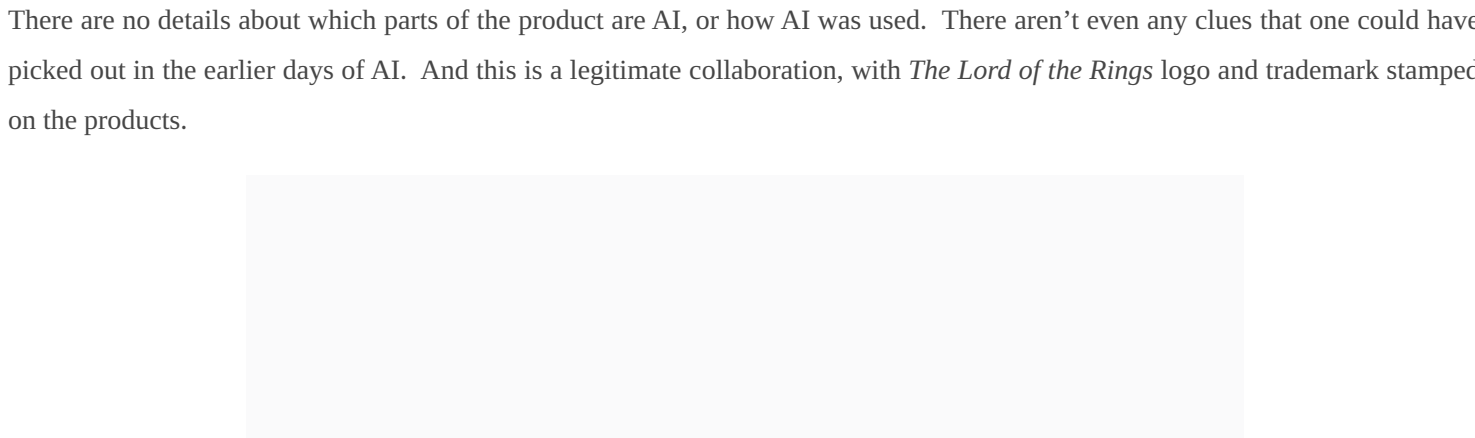
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