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The Silmarillion, Vol. 2



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Synopsis

Set in a time far earlier than Tolkien's master works, The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, this is the epic history of the elves, and the grand story of the creation of Tolkien's magical world. The Lord of the Rings narrated the great events at the end of the Third Age; but the tales of The Silmarillion are legends deriving from a much deeper past, when Morgoth, the first Dark Lord, dwelt in Middle-earth, and the High Elves made war upon him for the recovery of the Silmarils. Never published in the author's lifetime, The Silmarillion is an essential compendium for all Tolkien fans. It will be published in five consecutive volumes, each completely unabridged. The series contains not only the Quenta Silmarillion, but four other short works: the Ainulindale, Valaquenta, Akallabeth and Of the Rings of Power.

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Customer Reviews

Tolkien's 1977 tale could be called the Paradise Lost of Middle Earth. It tells of the Godlike Iluvatar's creation of all things, both physical and spiritual, in the Elder Days of Middle Earth in the First Age before the coming of elves and men. All was well until Melkor, Iluvatar's mightiest and brightest offspring, grew jealous of his master, desired his own creations, and made things in private while corrupting the designs of Iluvatar. Upon the discovery of his ill deeds, Melkor was cast down and became the first Dark Lord and scourge of Middle Earth (sound familiar?). Although it takes quite a while to get moving, the story eventually serves up epic battles of good and evil as Melkor, aided by his lieutenant, Sauron, who later figures prominently in The Lord of the Rings, is defeated by the human and elvin hosts of Middle Earth in a long and bitter war. Part 1 moves slowly while

introducing numerous characters and plot points. Parts 2 and 3 have considerably more action. Actor Martin Shaw’s reading is solid; it’s the cardboard packaging that’s flimsy. Recommended.?Michael Rogers, "Library Journal"Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Set in a time far earlier than Tolkien’s master works, The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, this is the epic history of the elves, and the grand story of the creation of Tolkien’s magical world. The Lord of the Rings narrated the great events at the end of the Third Age; but the tales of The Silmarillion are legends deriving from a much deeper past, when Morgoth, the first Dark Lord, dwelt in Middle-earth, and the High Elves made war upon him for the recovery of the Silmarils. Never published in the author’s lifetime, The Silmarillion is an essential compendium for all Tolkien fans. It will be published in five consecutive volumes, each completely unabridged. The series contains not only the Quenta Silmarillion, but four other short works: the Ainulindale, Valaquenta, Akallabeth and Of the Rings of Power.

First, one correction: the info next to title says ’abridged’ but fortunately it is ’Unabridged’! There is far too much to say about this phenomenal work by the great visionary J.R.R.Tolkien so I’ll comment on the reading. Although these reviews are of the audiobook version, I haven’t found any reviews that cover this aspect (the reading), although I may have overlooked some. I had read ’The Silmarillion’ 2 or 3 times before I discovered any audiobook version. I listened to one by a woman I now forget and it was well done but did not make a big impression. But then I found one read by Martin Shaw, a fine actor of stage & screen, especially of Shakespeare’s plays. From the first moment his voice captivated me and began to bring Tolkien’s text alive as never before! I have listened to very, very many readers of literature, from the days of cassette only to all the current formats and I can say with total conviction that, for me, Shaw’s reading of ’The Silmarillion’ is the most inspired and effective of any in my experience! The same goes for his reading of ’The Hobbit’, although unfortunately it is abridged, but this does not take away from Shaw’s performance. But ’The Silmarillion’ is unabridged and complete and Shaw’s reading truly illuminates the text, like a Silmaril from Morgoth’s crown.

In the Tolkien canon, THE SILMARILLION is the most highly contested of all his works. Constructed as a prehistoric history of the Universe, the book has the cultural significance of the Bible in Tolkien’s universe. It is Tolkien’s primary work, but it’s also his most troublesome, in more ways

than one. One thing you need to know. In Tolkien scholarship, there are two primary ways to refer to the "Silmarillion". One is the Silmarillion, the legendarium proper, and then the 1977 SILMARILLION, which may or may not be what Tolkien envisioned.THE SILMARILLION, the book Tolkien spent all of his adult life writing, was, sadly, incomplete when Tolkien died at the age of eighty one in 1973. Naturally, this begs the question why did it take him decades to write the book, and it still be unfinished after all that time? Well, to understand that, you need to understand two things: the scope of the project, and how Tolkien worked.The scope of the book was a complete imaginary history, a totally self-contained mythology, all written and developed for his home country, England (my home country as well). Imagine the Greek and Roman mythologies, all those myths and gods, developed by one man. Imagine Homer completely inventing all the gods for his stories. Imagine how hard that would be to come up with your own mythological traditions as such. No wonder Tolkien had such a hard time completing the work.Now, the scope (which is extremely ambitious for any artist) was compounded by how Tolkien worked. First, he was a philologist first and foremost, and so before the stories he invented languages. All of these languages (which would have taken a life-time to develop on their own) had their own history, and are so interlocked with the mythology that you cannot remove them. He developed the main body of legends around these languages. Many features of the central body of legends changed relatively little over the years, but he wrote different versions of them at different times and in different styles. Some of the legends were set in poetry, those in annalistic histories, others in condensed summaries, and others in the more traditional (at least, for modern readers) novel format. A lot of these writings are also unfinished, due to Tolkien’s perfectionist tendencies. Christopher Tolkien said that for most of his father’s writing there existed a stable tradition from which Tolkien worked from, but there was no such thing as a stable text for the primary legends.All this is tied to how Tolkien worked. C. S. Lewis famously stated that you did not influence Tolkien, you may as well as try to influence a bandersnatch. Tolkien would either take no notice of your criticism, or else he would start all over from the beginning. And so he did. A lot. Tolkien would reach a certain portion of the draft, be unsatisfied, and began the whole thing over again, while never reaching the end. Or Tolkien would have two copies of the same manuscript, one to be the fair copy and one to be working copy. Well, Tolkien would make conflicting revisions on both copies at separate times. How do you decide his final intent? Good question. These tendencies presented major problems from Christopher Tolkien when he prepared the 1977 SILMARILLION.Another problem with Tolkien’s work also is that toward the end of his life, he began contemplating changing major features of the mythology that stretched back to the earliest versions. A lot of these changes had to do with cosmology, with the sun and

moon, and changing Arda (the earth) from a flat-world to a round world. In the original mythology, and the 1977 version, Arda begins as a flat world but is made into a round world. Tolkien contemplated other major changes that would have totally changed much of the more distinguishable features of the mythology, stable features present from the very beginning. Consult "Myths Transformed" in MORGOTH'S RING, Vol. 10 of THE HISTORY OF MIDDLE-EARTH for more information.Then we have the problem of THE LORD OF THE RINGS. Tolkien was tantalizing close to some sort of final version of the work in the late 1930s (indeed, the 1937 version of the "Quenta Silmarillion" is the only complete version he ever made of the primary work and which is heavily used in the 1977 SILMARILLION). Then, due to publisher demand, Tolkien began working on his masterpiece for the next fourteen years, leaving the "Silmarillion" legendarium completely untouched for over a decade. When Tolkien picked up the Silmarillion again, he now had to account for LOTR and somehow incorporate that major work into the mythology. Tolkien did a lot of work on the legendarium after the completion of LOTR, but this work was plagued with uncertainty and contemplation of radical rewriting.And in the last years of his life, Tolkien also began moving away from strict narrative and began working extensively on theological matters, essays on Elvish culture and lingustics, and other matters not tied to the actual narrative of the main storyline.So when Tolkien died in 1973, he left his son Christopher in quite the predicament. Decades of writng, much if it unfinished, with a staggering palimpsest of manuscripts from which to draw from would be daunting to anyone. As literary executor, he had to come up with a publishable version of the work (as clearly that was his father's wishes, and Christopher was the man for the job, being most acquainted with the work). So, in four years, with the assistance of Guy Gavriel Kay, he cobbled together a self-contained narrative, largely compatible with the Hobbit cycle. Due to Tolkien's tendency to not finish drafts, some of the narrative in the last portion of the work had not been touched by Tolkien in literally decades (The Fall of Gondolin never got a complete version other than the 1916 Lost Tales story). Thingol and Melian presented thorny problems, especially the Girdle of Melian (her magical protection around Doriath). Christopher and Kay constructed the chapter dealing with the ruin of Doriath from scratch, with no corresponding writing in Tolkien's own work.Yet another major issue was, due to getting a version of the book published as soon as possible, Christopher rushed through much of material, and did not have access to all of his father's manuscripts, some of which had been sold off. While he always used post LOTR material as often as possible, Christopher was as many times incorrect as not when guessing his father's intentions for the work. In the ensuing twelve volumes of THE HISTORY OF MIDDLE-EARTH, where he had years to get to know the manuscripts, Christopher examines more closely his father's works, and

there is much in those twelve volumes that were Tolkien’s final intention for the work, but did not make it into the published version. Christopher has stated, given time, he may have produced a much different version than the one published. But he is now retired and will not revise the book (much of which would have to be wholesale).That’s quite a bit of history, and ultimately all that history may bog potential readers down in their journey into THE SILMARILLION. For all of its imperfections, its unfinished nature, the endless debates on how much the 1977 version is what Tolkien really intended, the book is powerful mythology. The reading is dry, and the names are jawcracking trying to pronounce. While it’s hard to keep track of the multitude of characters and all the permutations and migrations of the three main Elven tribes, there are unforgettable images in the book, and beautiful passages of despair and hope.While the work is not the most accessible for modern readers, for those who persist you can see why Tolkien really did regard this as his life work, or, as Tom Shippey says, "the work of his heart". And what a mighty work it is, despite its unfinished

nature.....----------Bonus Content:In November 28, 1999, I released a small review of "The Silmarillion" on .com (which is still accessible on the main product listing of this book), and as bonus content to the review proper (which is up above), I am including my original reviewTolkien’s Bible, November 28, 1999"Hark now to "The Silmarillion", the Bible of Tolkien’s fantasy world. This is not a work to be taken lightly, for here we at last uncover the great truths of Middle-earth, and hear of its creation."The Silmarillion", simply put, is a tragic book, beautiful, with one flaw that nearly kills it. It was unfinished. We do not know (or ever will) how much different it would have been if Tolkien live to complete his greatest work. Christopher his son has done as well as can be expected, but there are quite a few style shifts betraying his pen instead of his father’s. This is to be read with such seriousness as "The Iliad" or "The Odyssey". It is a mythological work that should be studied. This is not for a conventional reader, this is for the serious student. Without the knowledge his other two novels (for "The Lord of the Rings" is one novel, not a trilogy) "The Lord of the Rings" and "The Hobbit", "The Silmarillion" is not near as rewarding as it would otherwise be. "The Hobbit" is for children, "The Lord of the Rings" is for adults, and "The Silmarillion" is for students of this great work. All students interested in literature should read this, flawed as it is because of the mortality of man.It also shows how strong Tolkien believed in God. His world was very much a Christian world, set up in the likeness of God. God is never mentioned in "The Lord of the Rings", but as I remember he is in "The Silmarillion". You see him with the Ainur create the world. Truly, this is a master of fantasy, and a great Christian man."

A long-time Tolkien fan, I have always enjoyed The Silmarillion, though it’s never been my favourite. Martin Shaw’s reading may just change that! Hearing Mr Shaw’s rendering of Tolkien’s prose is a truly magical experience. I enjoyed his reading of The Hobbit, but this text is much more moving. Mr Shaw manages both the high linguistic style and the Elvish words with dignity and makes the text come alive in a way that is simply amazing. (We can only hope that Mr Shaw has plans for The Lord of the Rings.) The decision of the publisher to release the text unabridged is also very welcome -- the mythic style and scope of the book demand that every story in it be told, and it is well worth the cumulative price of the volumes.

The Silmarillion is one of the most stirring, well-written literary epics I have read. Every time I pick it up, I am captivated by Tolkien’s mastery of language and storytelling; each chapter is written as a story unto itself, yet part of a whole that makes you want to read more. He has created a whole new mythos...just read "Of the Sun and the Moon", and you will be drawn into this world. Should be on every high-school reading list.

The story of "The lord of the Rings" is spectacular,because it took me to a whole other world where I felt I was in the adventure myself.I believe this is one of the best books I have ever read.

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