

# Reading Book Beren and Lúthien By J.R.R. Tolkien



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The tale of Beren and Lúthien was, or became, an essential element in the evolution of The Silmarillion, the myths and legends of the First Age of the World conceived by J.R.R. Tolkien. Returning from France and the battle of the Somme at the end of 1916, he wrote the tale in the following year. Essential to the story, and never changed, is the fate that shadowed the love of Beren and Lúthien: for Beren was a mortal man, but Lúthien was an immortal elf. Her father, a great elvish lord, in deep opposition to Beren, imposed on him an impossible task that he must perform before he might wed Lúthien. This is the kernel of the legend; and it leads to the supremely heroic attempt of Beren and Lúthien together to rob the greatest of all evil beings, Melkor, called Morgoth, the Black Enemy, of a Silmaril. In this book Christopher Tolkien has attempted to extract the story of Beren and Lúthien from the comprehensive work in which it was embedded; but that story was itself changing as it developed new associations within the larger history. To show something of the process whereby this legend of Middle-earth evolved over the years, he has told the story in his father's own words by giving, first, its original form, and then passages in prose and verse from later texts that illustrate the narrative as it changed. Presented together for the first time, they reveal aspects of the story, both in event and in narrative immediacy, that were afterwards lost. Published on the tenth anniversary of the last Middle-earth book, the international bestseller The Children of Húrin, this new volume will similarly include drawings and color plates by Alan Lee, who also illustrated The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit and went on to win Academy Awards for his work on The Lord of the Rings film trilogy.

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Review "Every version of the story in the book is incomplete, but under Christopher Tolkien's steady editorial hand, the fragments assemble themselves to give us an impression of the whole. What makes this possible is the grace with which he handles his long-accustomed dual role of guide to both story and history. His preface and annotations are openhearted and engaging. He leads the reader pleasantly through the greater landscape of Middle-earth in the First Age, and strikes as clear a path as possible through the wilderness of Tolkien's lifelong attempts to get the story finished and published. With eloquence and diligence and care, the son reconstructs and retraces the father's journey, pursuing the tale through draft after draft as Tolkien pursued his vision of Middle-earth; as Beren, lost and hunted, followed the sound of Lúthien's voice as she sang in the shadowed forest of Doriath." — NPR.org "A good introduction to LOTR fans nervous about taking on The Silmarillion, and also gives longtime fans a fascinating look at the Tolkiens' myth-making process."— EntertainmentWeekly.com "A beautiful book."— San Antonio Express-News About the Author J.R.R. TOLKIEN (1892-1973) is the creator of Middle-earth and author of such classic and extraordinary works of fiction as *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*. His books have been translated into more than fifty languages and have sold many millions of copies worldwide. CHRISTOPHER TOLKIEN is the third son of J.R.R. Tolkien. Appointed by Tolkien to be his literary executor, he has devoted himself to the editing and publication of unpublished writings, notably *The Silmarillion*, *Unfinished Tales*, and *The History of Middle-earth*. ALAN LEE was born in England in 1947. Inspired by Tolkien's work to pursue his chosen path as an artist of the mythic and fantastic, he has illustrated a wide range of books including *Faeries*, *The Mabinogion*, *Castles*, *Merlin Dreams*, the centenary edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Hobbit*. He is a winner of the Carnegie Medal for his illustrated edition of *The Illiad*.

Customer Reviews Most helpful customer reviews 181 of 186 people found the following review helpful. It's a literary lesson—not a novel By William D. Freeman For those wondering just what this book may be, here is the skinny: 1. This is NOT a single-narrative novel. It is not even a pieced-together story like *The Children of Hurin*. 2. THIS IS a collection of incomplete manuscripts and manuscript extracts that JRRT wrote over the course of many years as he struggled (unsuccessfully) to set out in full the tale of Beren and Luthien. Son and editor Christopher Tolkien has selected the material presented here to show how his father's conception of the story evolved over time. This is the point of the book. 3. All of the manuscript material included here has been published before in various volumes of *The History of Middle Earth*. Nothing new is included. This IS the story that was closest to Tolkien's heart, and it is the great tragedy of his career that he never finished a full-length version. He made several substantial efforts in poetry and prose and simple summaries only to abandon each one. With each effort he changed the storyline and the details. Most notably Beren went from being an elf to being a man. Out of all this, Christopher Tolkien pieced together one of the longest chapters in *The Silmarillion*. In this book, he provided a dedicated illustration of the complexities with which he had to contend. No one will ever KNOW the story of Beren and Luthien because JRRT never worked it out himself. Readers of this book, however, will take away some understanding of the Professor worked on his legend off and on through the years. 104 of 105 people found the following review helpful. Tolkien's Most Personal Story By John D. Cofield One beautiful day in the spring of 1917 a young man and woman went for a stroll through a wood outside the village of Roos in Yorkshire. They wandered into a glade filled with long stemmed flowers bearing white blossoms. The woman danced and sang among the flowers while the man, who was still thin and weak after a severe case of trench fever, stood watching. Shortly after that golden day the man incorporated its memory into a story he was writing that he intended to be part of a "mythology for England," a series of interconnected tales he had been working on since his days at Oxford years earlier. The man was John Ronald Reuel Tolkien and the woman was his wife Edith Bratt Tolkien, whom he had loved for many years before their marriage in the spring of 1916. The story Tolkien wrote and rewrote over many years had several different versions, but the story of a beautiful woman dancing in a forest clearing was always part of it. Eventually it became *The Tale of*

Beren and Luthien. Beren was a mortal Man who after many adventures and hardships wandered through a mysterious wood in Beleriand, a large realm in the West of Middle-earth defended by Elves and Men against the tyranny of the Dark Lord Morgoth and his minions. Beren came across a beautiful woman dancing in a glade filled with white flowers. She was Luthien, daughter of King Thingol of the Elves. They fell in love, but King Thingol refused to allow them to marry unless they brought him a Silmaril, one of three magical gems crafted in Valinor across the Sea but stolen by Morgoth centuries earlier. Their Quest, its fulfillment, and Beren and Luthien's ultimate fate make up the Tale, which became a center piece of Tolkien's mythology. He referred to Beren and Luthien several times in *The Lord of the Rings* (whose characters Aragorn and Arwen are descendants of and counterparts to Beren and Luthien), and eventually a version of the Tale was included in *The Silmarillion*, which was completed by Tolkien's son Christopher and published in 1977. Later Christopher Tolkien was to edit and publish the twelve volume *History of Middle-earth*, which includes several more versions of the Tale in both prose and poetic forms. In this beautiful book we have the Tale itself in several of its versions beginning with the Tale of Tinuviel, which was written in the early years of Tolkien's development of his mythology and which contains some elements which were later discarded or drastically altered. For example, a major villain in the Tale of Tinuviel is Tevildo Prince of Cats, who was later to become Sauron, the chief servant of Morgoth. There are extracts from an early poetic version, *The Lay of Leithian* as well as from other versions written by Tolkien at various times during his life. Most if not all of this material has already been published in *The Silmarillion* and *The History of Middle-earth*, but having it all available in one volume is very valuable. In addition, Christopher Tolkien has provided an extensive Preface, some Notes on *The Elder Days*, and more introductory material on the Tale itself. These will be invaluable to experienced Tolkien scholars as well as those who might not be as familiar with the wider range of Middle-earth material. An additional pleasure are the nine illustrations in full color plates provided by Alan Lee, one of the most well-known and talented artists at work depicting Tolkien's worlds today. His paintings have an ethereal quality that absolutely befit their subject. Since there is very little previously unpublished material in *Beren and Luthien* some might wonder whether a separate volume is worthwhile. I can assure them that the careful production and attention to detail in extracting one narrative from a very rich fabric makes this book highly desirable. Additionally, Christopher Tolkien notes in his Preface that as he is now in his ninety-third year this is "presumptively" his last edition of his father's writings after over forty years of labor. He also writes that "the tale is chosen in memoriam" because it played such a strong part in his father's life and marriage, therefore it can be considered one of Tolkien's most personal stories. Tolkien himself made reference to his attachment to this Tale shortly after Edith's death in 1971. He wrote to his son Christopher about that spring day in Roos, saying that she was the "chief source" of what was to become a major part of his legendarium. Today J.R.R. Tolkien and Edith Bratt Tolkien are buried beneath a single headstone carved with their names and dates and "Beren" and "Luthien." 100 of 102 people found the following review helpful. ""But this book does not offer a single page of original and unpublished work. What then is the need, now, for such a book?"" By Philip Manitta I purchased the special edition in slipcase. The quality of the book is excellent. It is in the same format as, and perfectly compatible on my bookshelf next to, the special edition of *The Children of Hurin*. If you a collector who reveres books or Tolkien, you should get this edition. I won't belabor that point further. The rest of the this review will focus only on the contents. This is not the book I was expecting. The quote that appears in my headline is straight out of the preface. And indeed the rest of the preface goes on to attempt to answer that question. In short, the goal was to get all of the existing revisions of *Beren and Luthien* into one place. This is very different from the purpose of *The Children of Hurin*. And the resulting product is a very different kind of reading. If you have studied the *History of Middle Earth* series (and if you are considering the purchase of THIS book, you are almost certainly aware of them to some extent) then you already know that the major literary work of Christopher Tolkien's life has been to find a way to get all of the fragments of his father's writing, at all stages of his life, sorted out into chronological order and published with extensive commentary

to show how his father's conception of the world, the languages, and the tales themselves changed over time. Regrettably, very few of those tales were ever completed, and fewer still were completed at a stage that was compatible with his final conception of Middle Earth as seen in the Lord of the Rings. Many of us, myself included, were fascinated by the Histories. They served a great purpose. And they curiously straddled an unusual divide: the meticulous level of documentation could be of interest only to scholars and historians, but they also contained the last bits of story that fans desperately wanted to read, even in their incomplete forms. But sometimes.... you just want to read a cohesive story. Isn't that ultimately what we started this journey for? The story moved us. It's a tribute to the power of Tolkien's stories that we also wanted to "see how the sausage was made." Sadly, the last bits of even semi-completed narrative, that were also compatible with the published version of The Lord of the Rings, were published in 1980 in Unfinished Tales. Until, that is - the publication of The Children of Hurin in 2007. It was a gift from above. Finally, we had one of the tales of the Elder Days definitively re-edited into a single, cohesive narrative, simply readable as a story - without constantly being interrupted to explain which folio the next three sentences were taken from, and why they are preferred over the pencil-erased version in the margins of an earlier notepad. I'm sure many of us believed that Beren and Luthien was to follow that model. It does not. This, to put it lightly, dashed my hopes. The book I hoped this would be, does not exist, and will never exist. Apparently the remaining fragments of text needed to complete a long-form prose version of this story were either never written, or Christopher Tolkien does not think them worthy of publication. Frankly, I don't think the marketing material was suitably clear on this. And that is my essential criticism. The contents of the book are themselves wonderful. However, every word of it was taken from the first five volumes of The Histories. If you have those books, then you have no need (other than aesthetic) for this book. If you have not been introduced to those books, then you might be taken aback by the nature of this one. This book really only serves three purposes: 1) It DOES succeed in making it much easier to follow the development of this one particular tale, outside of its possibly-overwhelming context. Yes. Having all of the material from the histories in one place makes researching the transition of Tevildo, Prince of Cats into Sauron, the Dark Lord in training much easier. (For example). It does not however give any new insight, since you've already read it in The Book of Lost Tales II. 2) It DOES look beautiful on a bookshelf full of other special editions of Tolkien's work. This point is not trivial to me, nor to some of you. We are readers. We consider a well-bound book to be a work of art. 3) As with The Children of Hurin, it contains a number of beautiful paintings by Alan Lee. These are worth seeing, and certainly won't be available in the mass market version. tl;dr: I'm happy to have this book. I'm sad that it doesn't contain new material or a final cohesive narrative. See all 112 customer reviews...

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