

tea with tolkien presents  
SILMARILLION SUMMER  
2022 READ-ALONG



Silmarillion Summer: A Five-Part Overview of *The Silmarillion* by J.R.R. Tolkien  
Presented by the Tea with Tolkien Community

## Part One: Introduction to *The Silmarillion*

### Introduction to *The Silmarillion*

*The Silmarillion* is one of Tolkien's most challenging works and yet also the most beautiful and important in my opinion. Many Tolkien fans new and old often feel intimidated by its depth and bewildered by its vocabulary, but it's become my goal to encourage, equip, and inspire Tolkien fans to not only pick up *The Silmarillion* — but to finish it as well!

Like many new Tolkien readers, I struggled through several attempts to read *The Silmarillion* for the first time. I had been captivated by *The Lord of the Rings* and read it many times in high school, but I couldn't seem to make it past the first few pages of *The Silmarillion* and eventually every attempt ended right around the Valaquenta. It gathered dust on my bookshelf for years until I finally picked it up again about five years ago. But this time, I took a different approach.

Rather than attempting to understand the complexities of Tolkien's mythology on my own, I surrounded myself with as many resources as I could find. And approaching it with this mindset made all the difference. Thanks to a handful of Tolkien podcasts, the audiobook narrated by Martin Shaw, pages of handwritten notes, and many, many visits to Tolkien Gateway, I was able to finish *The Silmarillion* for the first time!

*The Silmarillion* is very different from *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, so it can be a bit disorienting if you aren't prepared. The narrative style is much more wandering, poetic, and

reminiscent of older texts (some have compared its style to that of the Old Testament at times). The events of *The Silmarillion* occur thousands of years before Bilbo found the Ring, so you'll find very few familiar faces or locations. In fact, it's in *The Silmarillion* that we witness the very creation of the world itself!

*The Silmarillion* is primarily a history book (if you insist on placing it into a genre) that looks at the various major stories of Arda from a wider perspective. In a sense there is less character development than in Tolkien's other Middle-earth tales, as there is no single protagonist throughout the whole book. Instead, many characters shine through as the protagonist of their own stories, which are often contained within a single chapter.

It is my belief that one's first reading of *The Silmarillion* should be focused on simply enjoying the text and not worrying too much about remembering every single detail. Once you fall in love with the stories of this book, you'll want to come back for a second, more careful reading. In this summer series, we are going to do our best to breeze through *The Silmarillion* in order to retain the general plotlines and essentially "get to know" the main characters.

## Framing *The Silmarillion* in Context

### The Waldman Letter

The Waldman letter is a letter written to Milton Waldman, an editor and advisor to publishers in London, who had expressed an interest in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* after the widespread success of *The Hobbit*. For context, *The Hobbit* was published in 1937, this letter was written in 1951, and *The Fellowship of the Ring* would not be published until 1954. Unfortunately, *The Silmarillion* itself was not published until 1977 after Tolkien's death.

Tolkien had hoped to publish *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* together and this letter reflects his belief that the two were interdependent. This letter is important because it pieces together all of Tolkien's stories concerning Middle-earth, showing how they are all a part of the same "great tale".

The letter can be read in a few places:

- [In part, on the Tolkien Estate Website](#) (there is a large chunk missing in the middle in which Tolkien writes about the creation of his world and its history through the Second Age)
- [The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, Letter 131](#)
- In the preface to *The Silmarillion* (second edition only)

### What's in the Waldman Letter?

- Tolkien writes that he can't remember when he wasn't building his imaginary world or its languages, noting that almost all the names in his world are derived from these languages. This gives his works a specific kind of consistency that others may not have.
- Tolkien has always been passionate about myth, desiring a myth that could be uniquely English.
- Tolkien states that the three major themes of his works are Fall, Mortality, and Machine.
- He then goes on to write about the Magic of the Elves as *Art* versus the enemy's use of Machine.
- After that, he launches into a summary of his world's history, from its creation all the way through its third age, which I will not attempt to summarize for the sake of brevity and in hopes of simply encouraging you to read this letter for yourself.

### Ainulindalë: The Music of the Ainur

It is in this chapter that we see the creation of the world through the music of Eru Ilúvatar and the Ainur, the beginning of the unrest of Melkor, the descent of the Valar into the world, and the first battle of the Valar against Melkor.

#### The Music of the Ainur

There was Eru, the One, also called **Ilúvatar**, the creator God of Tolkien's myth. He made first the **Ainur**, the Holy Ones, which are angelic beings and have been called gods. Ilúvatar spoke to the Ainur, teaching them in song, and they sang before him. First alone, next together. Ilúvatar introduced the first theme, and there was harmony for a time.

**Melkor**, greatest of the Ainur, altered his part in the music in an attempt to increase his power and glory. Discord arose among the Ainur. Ilúvatar began a new theme (the second theme), but Melkor contended with it. Then, a third. Finally, Ilúvatar arose and ended the Music entirely.

Ilúvatar showed the Ainur a vision: the world and its history unfolding. “Behold your music” — for through it was the world made. In the vision, the Ainur saw the **Children of Ilúvatar**, and they loved them. Many desired to go down into the world and prepare it for the Children; Melkor desired to rule over them and be called “Lord”.

The vision ended but Ilúvatar then spoke the world into being. Some of the Ainur chose to go into the world — they are called the **Valar**. The Valar then began the long work of preparing the world for the Children, all the while Melkor meddled in their plans.

## Valaquenta

Valaquenta begins with a short summary of *Ainulindalë*. It then goes on to introduce the Lords and the Queens of the Valar, giving a bit of background information on each of them and explaining how they relate to one another. I know these can be difficult to remember or differentiate so I’ve included a printable chart at the back of this book.

Next, we are introduced to the Maiar, spirits like the Valar but of a lesser degree. The last section is titled “Of the Enemies” and explains a bit more about the cruelty of Melkor as well as introducing his servant Sauron.

### Meet the Valar

- **Manwë**, King of the Ainur; delights in air, wind, sky, height
- **Ulmo**, Lord of Waters: seas, rivers, fountains, lakes
- **Aulë**, Lord of Substances; Craftsman of the Valar
- **Oromë** (Aldaron), Hunter of monsters and fell beasts
- **Mandos** (Námo), Keeper of the Houses of the Dead
- **Lórien** (Irmo), Master of visions and dreams
- **Tulkas** (Astaldo), Delights in strength and contests
- **Varda** (Elbereth), Lady of the Stars
- **Yavanna** (Kementári), Giver of Fruits; delights in growing things
- **Nienna**, Lady of Sorrow and Lamerter of Griefs

- **Estë**, Healer of Hurts and Sorrows
- **Vairë**, Weaver of Time
- **Vána**, who delights in birds and flowers
- **Nessa**, who delights in dance and racing

## The Relationships of the Valar

- Manwë dwells with Varda
- Aulë dwells with Yavanna
- Mandos dwells with Vairë
- Lórien dwells with Estë
- Tulkas dwells with Nessa
- Oromë dwells with Vána
- Ulmo dwells alone
- Nienna dwells alone

Melkor, now named Morgoth, is no longer counted among the Valar.

*See the chart at the end of this document for reference.*

## The Maiar

The Maiar are spirits of the same kind as the Valar but of lesser degree. They are often servants or helpers to the Valar.

Tolkien writes in Valaquenta that the chief of these are...

- **Ilmarë**, Handmaid of Varda
- **Eönwë**, Standard-bearer and Herald of Manwë
- **Ossë**, Vassal of Ulmo and Master of Seas
- **Uinen**, Lady of Seas, Protector of Númenóreans
- **Melian**, Spouse of Thingol, mother of Lúthien; Servant to Vána and Estë
- **Olórin** (also called Mithrandir and Gandalf), Wisest of the Maiar, defender of the Free Peoples

- **Sauron** (also called Gorthaur the Cruel), Servant of Morgoth

## Quenta Silmarillion

### Chapter One: Of the Beginning of Days

#### The Spring of Arda

In the first war of the Valar against Melkor, Tulkas came to Arda, and Melkor fled. Aulë wrought the two lamps: **Illuin** to the North and **Ormal** to the South. Yavanna's seeds began to sprout, and the beasts arose on the earth. The first dwelling of the Valar was made and called the Isle of Almaren. The Valar rested and held a great feast during which Tulkas married Nessa.

After the festival, Tulkas rested; Melkor seized this opportunity to come back into Middle-earth unnoticed. Melkor knocked over the two lamps and fled to Utumno. The Valar were unable to pursue him because they were preoccupied with repairing the earth and reining in the destruction caused by Melkor. *"Thus ended the Spring of Arda."*

#### The Days of Bliss in Valinor

The Valar then left Middle-earth and went to Aman. The Valar established their home in Valinor and all was at peace there. Yavanna created the two trees of Valinor: **Telperion** (dark green and silver) and **Laurelin** (light green and gold).

With the Trees began the **Days of Bliss** in Valinor and the **Count of Time**. As time passed and Melkor had his way in Middle-earth, Yavanna urged the other Valar to make war against him again.

#### The Children of Ilúvatar

The Valar awaited the coming of the Children of Ilúvatar, who are **Elves and Men**. Elves are the firstborn and immortal, also called the Quendi. Men are the followers and are mortal; they are also called the Atani.

## Chapter Two: Of Aulë and Yavanna

*“For thou hast from me as a gift thy own being only, and no more; and therefore the creatures of thy hand and mind can live only by that being, moving when thou thinkest to move them, and if thy thought be elsewhere, standing idle. Is that thy desire?”*

Aulë, impatient for the coming of the Children of Iluvatar, created the Dwarves in secret. Ilúvatar chastised him for doing so but ultimately forgave him and allowed the Dwarves to live — giving them life of their own whereas Aulë had not had the authority to do so. However, the Dwarves were not permitted to awaken before the coming of the Elves and Men. The Dwarves are the Children of Ilúvatar by “adoption,” which differentiates them from the Elves and Men. Afterwards, Yavanna created the Ents and the Great Eagles to defend the living things that could not defend themselves.

## Chapter Three: Of the Coming of the Elves and the Captivity of Melkor

Middle-earth lay in a twilight — but Melkor did not sleep. Instead, he built up his strength in the North, breeding evil creatures such as Balrogs. Sauron was in charge of Melkor’s stronghold called Angband. In this time, Varda (Elbereth) made the stars.

### The Coming of the Elves

Finally, the Elves awakened beneath Varda’s stars. They named themselves the **Quendi**. **Oromë** was the first of the Valar to find the Elves, but they feared him because Melkor had gotten to them first and taught them to fear. Oromë named the Elves the **Eldar**, but this name is only used for the Elves who followed him later. Melkor made the **Orcs** by capturing Elves and tormenting them, corrupting them into his service.

### The Captivity of Melkor

Finally, the Valar made war against Melkor on behalf of the Elves. **Tulkas** wrestled with Melkor and won; Melkor was taken into captivity. Sauron was not found at this time, so he

remained free. Melkor was sentenced to prison for three ages before he could plead for pardon again.

## **The Summons to Valinor**

The Valar summoned the Quendi to come to Valinor, but only some were willing to come. In order to earn their trust, **Oromë** brought ambassadors to Valinor: **Ingwë**, **Finwë**, and **Elwë**. These Ambassadors returned and urged their kindred to answer the summons and remove to the West. Some agreed, and others did not. The **Eldar** are the elves who agreed to leave; the **Avari** are the elves who refused the summons.

Thus began a great march of the Eldar to Aman. Those who arrived in Aman are called the **Calaquendi**; those who either remained at first or left the march along the way are called the **Moriquendi**.

## **The Sundering of the Elves**

*See the chart at the end of this document for further understanding of The Sundering of the Elves.*

## **Chapter Four: Of Thingol and Melian**

*“And of the love of Thingol and Melian there came into the world  
the fairest of all the Children of Iluvatar that was or ever shall be.”*

**Melian** was a Maia who lived in Lórien. She was beautiful, wise, and skilled in songs of enchantment; nightingales follow her. When the Quendi had recently awoken, she left Valinor and dwelt in the woods of Middle-earth. **Elwë**, Lord of the Teleri, first heard Melian singing in the wood of Nan Elmoth, and an enchantment fell upon him. He forgot all else, passing into the woods, and became lost. There he saw Melian, and they immediately fell in love.

Elwë and Melian stood still as if under a spell for years, and he was counted as lost among his kindred. Olwë, his brother, became the King of the Teleri and departed without him.



Elwë Singollo remained with Melian and became the King of the Eldar of Beleriand — called the Sindar, the Grey-Elves, the Elves of Twilight. Elwë was called **King Greymantle**, **Elu Thingol**, and Melian was his queen.

## **Chapter Five: Of Eldamar and the Princes of the Eldalië**

### **Making the Journey to Aman**

Oromë brought the Vanyar and Noldor through Beleriand. Ulmo uprooted an island and moved it as a boat to bring the Elves to Valinor. Part of the island broke off and was left behind. This is called the Isle of Balar.

### **The Teleri**

The Teleri took Olwë as their king and dwelt near the shores of Beleriand. They befriended Ossë and Uinen and learned sea-lore and sea music from them. After a time, many of the Teleri agreed to go to Valinor and departed on Ulmo's island. At Ossë's request, Ulmo anchored the isle of the Teleri just off the shores of Valinor, and it was called Tol Eressëa, the Lonely Isle. In this time, the Teleri's speech was sundered from that of the Vanyar and the Noldor.

Those of the Teleri who remained in Middle-earth were called the **Falathrim**, the Elves of the Falas. Círdan the Shipwright was their Lord. The friends of Elwë wouldn't leave Middle-earth, and they were called the **Eglath**, the Forsaken People.

### **A Home In Valinor**

In Valinor, the Vanyar and the Noldor were given a home. They missed the stars, so the Valar created a gap in between the Pelóri. There, they created a hill called Túna where the Elves would be able to see the stars.

Upon the crown of Túna the city of the elves was built: **Tirion**. There, the Vanyar and Noldor dwelt in friendship. Manwë and Varda loved the Vanyar (called “the Fair Elves”) most; Aulë loved the Noldor most. In this time, the Noldor first discovered the gems of the earth and thus enriched all Valinor.

## Finwë's Family Tree

*See Finwë Family Tree at the end of the book for clarification. This can get rather confusing!*

Finwë was King of the Noldor. The sons of Finwë were Fëanor, Fingolfin, and Finarfin. The mother of Fëanor was **Míriel**; the mother of Fingolfin and Finarfin was **Indis**, who Finwë wed after the death of Míriel.

**Seven sons of Fëanor:** Maedhros, Maglor, Celegorm, Caranthir, Curufin, Amrod, and Amras

**Sons of Fingolfin:** Fingon, Turgon, Aredhel, and Argon

**Children of Finarfin:** Finrod, Angrod, Aegnor, and Galadriel

## The Eldar in Aman

Eventually, the Teleri of Tol Eressëa desired to go all the way to Aman. Ulmo sent Ossë to them, and he taught them the craft of ship-building so they could travel all the way to the shores of Valinor.

The Vanyar became sundered from the Noldor: the Vanyar left Tirion and dwelt upon the mountain of Manwë, or about the plains and woods of Valinor.

Finwë was king of Tirion; Olwë king in Alqualondë; Ingwë was High King of all the Elves.

At the end of this chapter, all but two groups of elves are now in Aman. The two groups left behind in Middle-earth are the **Falathrim** and the **Eglath**.

# Meet the Valar

## Manwë

- King of the Ainur
- delights in air, wind, sky, height
- Lives atop Mount Taniquetil

## Varda (Elbereth)

- Lady of the Stars
- Dwells with Manwë
- Most hated by Morgoth

## Oromë (Aldaron)

- Hunter of monsters and fell beasts
- Lord of Forests

## Aulë

- Lord of Substances and Craftsman
- Creator of the Dwarves
- Most loves the Noldor

## Yavanna (Kementári)

- Giver of Fruits
- Delights in growing things
- Creator of the Ents and Great Eagles

## Vána

- Also called the Ever-Young
- Delights in Flora and Fauna
- Sister of Yavanna
- Queen of Flowers

## Mandos (Námo)

- Keeper of the Houses of the Dead
- Doomsman of the Valar

## Vairë

- Weaver of Time
- Weaver of the Story of Arda
- Her woven tapestries cover the Halls of Mandos

## Ulmo

- Dwells alone
- Lord of Waters: seas, rivers, fountains, lakes
- Never forsook Middle-earth

## Lórien (Irmo)

- Master of visions and dreams
- Dwells in the Gardens of Lórien

## Estë

- Dwells in the Gardens of Lórien
- Healer of Hurts and Sorrows

## Nienna

- Lady of Sorrow and Lamentation of Grievings
- Teacher of Mercy and Pity

## Tulkas (Astaldo)

- Delights in strength and contests
- Wrestled with Melkor

## Nessa

- Delights in dance and racing
- Deer follow her
- Sister of Oromë

## Melkor

- Melkor, now named Morgoth, is no longer counted among the Valar.

# The Sundering of the Elves

<p><b>The Quendi</b> All of the Elves</p>		
<p>The Calaquendi Elves of the Light who came to Aman in the Days of the Two Trees</p>		<p>The Moriquendi Elves of Darkness who never saw the Light of the Two Trees</p>
<p>The Eldar Elves who <b>accepted</b> the summons and began the journey to Aman</p>		<p>The Eldar Some of the Eldar began the journey but ended up staying in Middle-earth. They are also called the <b>Úmanyar</b>.</p> <p>The Avari  The Unwilling, who <b>refused</b> the Summons</p>
<p>Vanyar                  Noldor                  Teleri</p> <p>Completed the Journey to Aman</p>	<p>Teleri</p> <p>The <b>Sindar</b> ("Grey-Elves") Stayed in Beleriand</p> <p>The <b>Nandor</b> left the March of the Teleri East of the Misty Mountains.</p> <p>Some of the Nandor entered Beleriand and were called the <b>Laiquendi</b>, the Green-Elves of Ossiriand</p>	