

Flora of Middle-Earth: Plants of J.R.R. Tolkien's Legendarium

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Flora of Middle-Earth resides at the intersection of the mundane and the fantastical.

An ambitious labor of love, *Flora of Middle-Earth: Plants of J. R. R. Tolkien's Legendarium*, by Walter S. Judd and Graham A. Judd, marries science and art to illuminate the depth and breadth of the botanical underpinnings of J. R. R. Tolkien's works.

With painstaking care, this father-and-son duo examine Tolkien as environmentalist, displaying the extent to which Tolkien designed his mythos—down to the plant life. The authors insist that his affinity for the flora of Middle-Earth went beyond a novelist adding realistic window dressing to his imaginative world, and that Tolkien fully embraced his role as subcreator.

The book shows that Tolkien's Roman Catholic convictions related to a benevolent creator God and to the idea that humans possess something of the God-image themselves—enough to partner in God's creativity. Therefore the smallest details would have mattered to Tolkien, who sought to tie Middle-Earth to our own sphere. His works, the book says, should elicit serious engagement with the world around us, particularly in ecological regards.

The research here is extensive and fascinating. Different regions of Middle-Earth are compared with their ecological counterparts on Earth. The largest section of the book treats the plants of Tolkien's legendarium individually, including quotes from the major works. It offers a literary analysis of plants' roles in the mythos, their physical descriptions, and etymological dissections of their names.

A crash course in plant biology is offered, and while it certainly suffices as an introduction of terms and nomenclature, there are plenty of resources suggested for further study. Scholars, longtime fans, and newcomers alike will find much here to sate their appetites.

Graham Judd's illustrations are intricate and lovely, and their style harmonizes perfectly with their subjects. Eschewing more modern artistic trends and photographic representations, he achieves the look of relief carvings through digital magic. He pays homage to Tolkien the illustrator, as well as to the great tradition of other Tolkien illustrators, especially Alan Lee. The result is both informative and aesthetically pleasing.

Flora of Middle-Earth resides at the intersection of the mundane and the fantastical, bidding the scales to fall from humanity's plant-blind eyes so that, with Tolkien as guide, we may once again awaken to our symbiosis with complex, beautiful nature.

MEAGAN LOGSDON (University Press 2017)

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