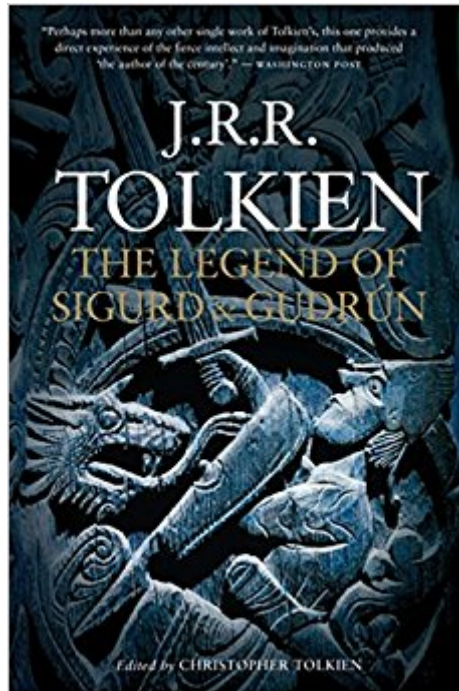




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The Legend Of Sigurd And Gudr  n



Synopsis

Many years ago, J.R.R. Tolkien composed his own version of the great legend of Northern antiquity, recounted here in *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*. In the Lay of the Völungs is told the ancestry of the great hero Sigurd, the slayer of Fáfnir, most celebrated of dragons; of his awakening of the Valkyrie Brynhild, who slept surrounded by a wall of fire, and of their betrothal; and of his coming to the court of the great princes who were named the Niflungs (or Nibelungs), with whom he entered into blood-brotherhood. In scenes of dramatic intensity, of confusion of identity, thwarted passion, jealousy, and bitter strife, the tragedy of Sigurd and Brynhild, of Gunnar the Niflung and Gudrún his sister, mounts to its end in the murder of Sigurd, the suicide of Brynhild, and the despair of Gudrún. The Lay of Gudrún recounts her fate after the death of Sigurd, her marriage against her will to the mighty Atli, ruler of the Huns (the Attila of history), his murder of her brothers, and her hideous revenge.

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Customer Reviews

"Will appeal strongly to readers already haunted by the deeper, more sombre musics of Middle-earth" *The Times*"This is the most unexpected of Tolkien's many posthumous publications; his son's 'Commentary' is a model of informed accessibility; the poems stand comparison with their Eddic models, and there is little poetry in the world like those" *Times Literary Supplement*"The compact verse form is ideally suited to describing impact... elsewhere it achieves a stark beauty" *Telegraph* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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 Appointed by Tolkien to be his literary executor, he has devoted himself to the editing and publication of unpublished writings, notably *The Silmarillion*, *Unfinished Tales*, and *The History of Middle-earth*.

A few corrections need to be made to the reviews already here. First: This book is NOT a translation. It is a set of two original poems by Tolkien, with supplemental materials. The poems retell one of the most famous stories in Norse legend--the sources are the two Eddas, the *Volsunga Saga*, and others--but Tolkien gives here his own version. The poem is in the medieval Norse meter and style, but it is a new version, again, not a translation. Second: These poems are not epics. I have already read a couple of reviews complaining that for epic poetry it isn't "epic" enough. But they aren't intended to be epic. As the introduction makes clear, Norse poetry had no epic mode (although Old English did). What epic verse does for some cultures the *Saga* did for the Norsemen. These poems are lays, which have a different intended effect, which is discussed in the introduction. Who needs to read this book? Certainly people who like *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* but hated *The Children of Hurin* when it came out recently, and who never got through the *Silmarillion*, will most likely not want this. If, when you read *The Lord of the Rings*, you skip the poems and songs, you should definitely skip this. On the other hand, if the Tolkien's poetry is especially attractive to you this may interest you. If you're interested in Tolkien's other writings, though, you probably will want this. For instance, if you've read vol. 3 of *The History of Middle Earth*, *The Lays of Beleriand*, you will know the sort of thing you're in for. On the other hand, if you don't care or don't know much about Tolkien's own invented mythology, this book will still fascinate you if you have an interest in Old English or medieval Icelandic literature. While this book is in general unconnected with Tolkien's own Middle-earth, it does shed some interesting light on it here and there. The Sigurd legend is, of course, related to Tolkien's legend of Turin Turambar. Seeing Tolkien in full heathen mode allows us to draw interesting contrasts with the "redeemed" paganism of his own mythology. Furthermore, Tolkien adds certain elements of his own to the traditional story of the Volsungs which are not irrelevant to the interpretation of his other writings. His interpretation of the heathen myth provides clues to his attitude to myth and its creation which are unique in his writings. This is not *merely* a retelling, but an artistic re-working of the old tale in light of his Tolkien's own insights, interests, and

concerns, as well as a virtuoso display of versecraft in an authentic medieval style and meter which, to my knowledge, no other modern author has mastered so well. This book, then, is not for everyone. But all the negative reviews I've seen blame it for not being something else. For what it is, it is excellent. For those interested in its content or its form, and for true lovers of Tolkien's work, it's a must-have.

So you liked THE LORD OF THE RINGS and THE HOBBIT, and now you want another great reading of Tolkien fantasy? Be careful of THE LEGEND OF SIGURD AND GUDRUN. It is a scholarly work. If you are interested in Norse mythology, though, and enjoy reading a good translation of Beowulf (which although not Norse mythology has a lot in common with Old Norse poetry) you will love this book. The tales of Odin and company were told and retold by many poets and saga writers, working hundreds of years apart. Many of their tellings are often contradictory. What Tolkien has done is to recreate a unified Norse mythology and given us new lays, written in English, but following the classic 8 line stanzaic style of the Elder Eddas, the Old Norse poetry form. This also means that there is none of the end rhyming we usually associate with poetry. No, these new lays use alliteration, just as in the Old English Beowulf. It really is a treat to get that style of poetry rendered in English. (Imagine yourself in an old mead hall, while a gifted bard recites in this long-ago verse form. Better yet, read it out loud and become the bard.) J.R.R. Tolkien's son, Christopher, has provided fascinating introductory information and explanatory notes that really make the reader feel like a serious student of Norse mythology and Old Norse poetry. This material occupies at least as many pages as the poems themselves. Without this extra material, much of the impact and complexity of the poems would be lost. If you are serious about understanding the life's work of perhaps the greatest author of the 20th Century and the influences that helped lead him to Middle Earth, take a chance on THE LEGEND OF SIGURD AND GUDRUN.

J. R. R. Tolkien's description of Norse poetry is that it "aims at seizing a situation, striking a blow that will be remembered, illuminating a moment with a flash of lightning..." In this retelling of the tragic Volsung legends Tolkien's terse, alliterative Norse style poetry does just that. He interweaves strands from "The Elder (Poetic) Edda", "The Prose Edda", "The Volsung Saga", and "The Nibelungenlied" while adding a few elements of his own invention. Tolkien's most interesting innovation is providing Sigurd with a "special function." For all of Tolkien's insistence that he prefers the pagan, pre-Christian version of the story, he gives Sigurd some elements of a Christ character that are not present in the original: "If in the day of Doom one deathless stand who death hath

tasted and dies no more the serpent-slayer seed of Odin then all shall not end nor earth perish." The explanatory notes by Christopher Tolkien are a badly organized jumble that cover vocabulary, use of various sources, differences between this version and the sources, and possible historical origins of the legends. If you are already acquainted with the Volsung stories these notes are mostly tedious, but they might be of some use for someone new to the Volsung legend. Despite Christopher's rambling notes, this is one of my favorite books. This tragic tale of heroism, greed, and betrayal illuminated by the flashing lightning of Tolkien's poetry takes the reader on an intense journey back to the heroic age.

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