

Tolkien About My Regeneration:
SF/Fandoms of the 20th Century in the Modern Day

Stories can open your eyes. They can delight and inspire. They can present straightforward heroes in worlds of grey, and reveal cultures and philosophies more than can be dreamed. They can be a solace, creating a found family, and they can bring families together. Stories can take you to another world.

When I was six years old, the first words of a book opened for me a new world. “In a hole in the ground, there lived a Hobbit,” my father read. Then, wonderfully, his text proceeded to answer not the obvious question, “what is a Hobbit?”, but to describe extensively the sort of hole this creature lived in. (A very nice one, neither worm-infested nor too dry and empty of cupboards, as it happens). The two of us, my young brother and I, listened with rapt attention as the songs rolled out and the Dragon appeared before us. As he continued, a serial of adventure unwound into a meditation on war, greed, and the honor in “simple,” peaceful, *kind* folk.

A year later, in another house in another state, with a new baby sister in the other room, he introduced me to another sentence, and with it, another new world and a new hope: “A Long Time Ago, in a Galaxy Far, Far Away...” These Wars in the Stars, though seeming simple, brought forth the strength of loyalty and the nobility and courage of compassion.

From these springboards I fell into the beauty in the incompleteness of the love of *Beren and Luthien*, the fearsome calculation of the brilliant *Thrawn*, the excitement of Diagon Alley and the joy of recognition in the face of one Scamander, the dangerous power of the truth of *Shannara*.

Eventually I came to find these worlds myself. Falling into *Doctor Who* and *The Prisoner*, Isaac Asimov and Douglas Adams, *Star Trek* and Poirot and all the others was, it would seem, almost entirely my own fault. (Though of course that's not the whole story.) Certainly I delved deeper in these areas than my family had done, or perhaps intended.

Nonetheless, these stories provided solace in my frequent solitary times and yet also brought the connections that have led to lasting friendships. And in time, I was able to return the world-expanding favors. When it was time, when she was ready for them, I brought out for my sister those tales of magic and adventure, courage and sacrifice. Through her eyes, I could return to Hogwarts, to the Shire, to the ancient dunes of Egypt and the punnery and power of a simple Tollbooth, or a Wardrobe. With friends, too, these tales old and new have been a delight and a point of connection, and of discovery and growth.

There are stories which reveal another world. Sometimes, they show us our own.

Anderson, Kevin J., ed. *Tales from the Mos Eisley Cantina*. New York: Bantam Books, 1995.

The first of three volumes collecting stories about background characters from the *Star Wars* films, and a major reason for the “everybody has an intricate, somewhat ridiculous backstory” side of *Star Wars*. One of my favorite stories here is built on the absurd complaint that two allegedly-identical twins in the film are visibly slightly different heights. Obviously, those must be spies pretending to be those two background characters in their only filmic appearance, and we’ve never seen the real Tonnika Sisters. That might sound both nit-picky and ridiculous, and it is, but it knows it, and sometimes being ridiculous can be fun.

Baker, Colin, performer. *Doctor Who: The Sixth Doctor: The Last Adventure*. Directed by Nicholas Briggs. Big Finish. CD.

A final story for Colin Baker’s Doctor, decades after his run on the show ended abruptly and acrimoniously, and a celebration of his era on the show and on nearly two decades of audio. An exquisite book-style release with interviews, art, and 5 CDs of full-cast radio drama inside.

Barrie, J. M., and Scott Gustafson. 1991. *Peter Pan*. New York: Viking.

The most beautiful edition of this text I have ever seen. I saw it once in a library, and spent years searching to find it again. It features 50 vividly-conceived oil paintings by Scott Gustafson which perfectly capture the image and tone of the story, both its adventure and its uncanniness. It doesn’t hurt to have a great story, too. At one point, I could recite nearly the entire book, and the entire stage musical, at the slightest prompting.

Briggs, Nicholas, writer. *Doctor Who: The Light at the End*. Performed by Tom Baker, Peter Davison, Colin Baker, Sylvester McCoy, and Paul McGann. Big Finish, 2013. CD.

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the longest-running sci-fi show in history, almost every living actor associated with the classic run of the show comes together for a special “Multi-Doctor” extravaganza. A beautiful book containing 5 CDs of material, it is a proper celebration of the show and also, I believe, the first physical item I purchased from Big Finish, the producers.

Briggs, Nicholas, writer. *The Prisoner: Volume One*. Performed by Mark Elstob. Big Finish, 2016. CD.

A reimagining of the classic 1960s spy-fi show about a man with no name trapped in a seemingly-tranquil Village bent on discovering his secrets by any means necessary. Art, interviews, and both reimagined and original episodes of the series on disc in a beautiful book format. The encouragement of the writer brought me to the show, then to this series, and then to the ‘60s-era pulp novels. Really incredibly strange, in a good way.

Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*. Doubleday, 1930.

The Great Detective in all his original cases! My edition has been reprinted quite a few times since 1930, but the tales of mystery remain fresh to this day.

Farrington, Ian, ed. *Doctor Who: The Audio Scripts Volume Two*. Maidenhead: Big Finish, 2003.

Contains the full scripts and information about their evolution for four early full-cast Doctor Who radio plays: the Egyptian pseudohistorical *The Eye of the Scorpion*, the farcical panto *The One Doctor*, the chilling *Dust Breeding*, and the timehopping *Seasons of Fear*. Quite out of print, but a great insight into how this more obscure area of non-televised Doctor Who came to be.

Farrington, Ian, ed. *Doctor Who: The Audio Scripts Volume Three*. Maidenhead: Big Finish, 2003.

Collects the draft and final scripts of the classic twice-adapted Cyberman origin story *Spare Parts*, the era-linking *Spectre of Lanyon Moor*, the inexplicable *The Rapture*, and the all-time Christmas classic locked-room mystery comedy tragedy *The Chimes of Midnight*. Two of these stories are often considered, for good reason, among the best in their genre, and seeing their evolutions is an intriguing delight.

Franklin, Marcia R. *The Neowhovian Experience 2013*. Saint Paul, MN: Double Pixel Publications, 2016.

The book form of a blog I follow chronicling a new *Doctor Who* fan's journey in the show's Fiftieth Anniversary year, when I myself had just discovered the show. Signed and given to me in a contest by the same.

Fry, Jason, and Paul R. Urquhart. *Star Wars: The Essential Guide to Warfare*. New York: Del Rey, 2012.

From the title, one would expect this to be a reference book obsessed with fictional guns and violence, but it is actually an intricate examination of the personal toll of the continual wars of the *Star Wars* galaxy. A reference book that nonetheless contains a sweeping narrative, and a very pleasant surprise. Signed by the author, a gift from the publishers during an era of increased fan engagement.

Hidalgo, Pablo. *Star Wars Propaganda: A History of Persuasive Art in the Galaxy*. New York, NY: Harper Design, 2016.

A look at how Propaganda functions across the eras of the *Star Wars* universe, and a lesson on the effectiveness of great design in the real world, too. Features prints of several of the in-universe posters, and a new way to see the stories being told right up to the current movies.

Parkin, Lance, and Lars Pearson. *AHistory: An Unauthorised History of the Doctor Who Universe*. Second ed. Des Moines, IA: Mad Norwegian Press, 2007.

An unusual reference book for an unusual show, and a great pun, the book is a speculative timeline of the time-travel-filled events of the universe of *Doctor Who*. Turns out there were several versions of the Mona Lisa.

Sandifer, Philip. *Tardis Eruditorum: an Unofficial Critical History of Doctor Who*. Vol. 1-3. Danbury, CT: Eruditorum Press, 2012-2014.

The first three volumes of a series adapted from the blog of a scholar investigating *Doctor Who* episode by all 800 episodes, with excursions for notable events of the real-life era, in the context of its era, message, and potential, and from a self-described leftist neomarxist point of view. Often contrary to my opinions, but never less than intriguing.

Schweighofer, Peter, ed. *Star Wars Adventure Journal*. Vol. 1, 2, 4, 5, and 8 of 15. Honesdale, PA: West End Games, 1994-1995.

Surprisingly in-depth but now quite obscure, a spinoff quarterly journal from the RPG based on the game, yet full of interesting story content and lore deep-dives, some of which remain an integral part of the post-reboot storytelling today. Also contains an amusing look at fake-news headlines from in-universe sources. Acquired primarily by used bookstore hunting. I also have the Second Edition game proper, gifted by a generous but unknown former Johnnie.

Segal, Philip, and Gary Russell. *Doctor Who Regeneration: The Story Behind the Revival of a Television Legend*. London: HarperCollinsEntertainment, 2000.

I searched for years for this out-of-print look at the creation of the only episode to feature Paul McGann's Eight, my favorite of the Doctors Who. It is beautiful, intricately detailed, and absolutely worth it.

Tolkien, J. R.R., Caspar Reiff, and Peter Hall, writers. *The Lord of the Rings: Complete Songs & Poems*. Performed by The Tolkien Ensemble and Christopher Lee. Distributed by Membran International, 2006. CD.

Achingly beautiful musical interpretations of each of the 69 poems in *The Lord of the Rings*, along with their texts and the illustrations of Queen Margarethe II of Denmark. I was overjoyed to receive a copy for a recent birthday, as the set is several years out-of-print (though now much of the music is available on Spotify!).

Tolkien, J. R.R. *Les Aventures de Tom Bombadil*. Translated by Dashiell Hedayat. Paris, France: Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 1990.

I once decided that I would acquire a copy of either *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings* on every international trip. I failed entirely my first opportunity, but succeeded twofold in the second, gaining a copy of the poetic compendium *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* as well. This edition features the translation and the original English on facing pages.

Tolkien, J. R.R. *Le Seigneur Des Anneaux: La Communauté de L'Anneau*. Translated by F. Ledoux. Paris, France: Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 2000.

The first volume of the French edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, acquired from a bookseller on the Seine during a choir tour to France. The four Tolkien books I purchased there were my primary souvenir, and required some extremely creative packing and the sacrifice of a pillow to bring back stateside, but were well worth it.

Tolkien, J. R.R., and F. Ledoux. *Le Seigneur Des Anneaux: Les Deux Tours*. Paris, France: Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 2000.

The second volume of the French *LotR* translation. I must admit that I haven't managed to make it this far in the French, but I haven't given up yet.

Tolkien, J. R.R. *Le Seigneur Des Anneaux: Le Retour du Roi*. Paris, France: Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 2000.

The third volume in the same. The set is beautiful in a classic pulpy sort of way. I may have thanked a bookseller extensively and in entirely the wrong languages upon discovery.

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Silmarillion*. New York: Del Rey, 2001.

The comprehensive answer to the question “whatever happened before *The Hobbit*?” by way of creation myth and outline of legendary history. Contains perhaps the most beautiful fictional story in human history, the second-best (and most musical) creation narrative, and also several very long lists of names. This edition has a cover I particularly like, yet cannot quite describe, an untraditional take on an elf holding the coveted Silmarils, the Jewels which preserve the remnants of the light of the world.

Tolkien, J. R. R., Wayne G. Hammond, and Christina Scull. *The Art of the Hobbit*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

In addition to being a celebrated author, philologist, professor, linguist, and poet, Tolkien was also an amateur artist. This volume contains every known illustration he created for or about *The Hobbit*, including his iconic design for the cover and the definitive painting of Smaug the Chiefest and Greatest of Calamities.

Tolkien, J. R. R., Wayne G. Hammond, and Christina Scull. *The Art of the Lord of the Rings*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015.

A second volume, collecting Tolkien's art for his famous novel *The Lord of the Rings*. Materials range from quick pencil drawings to paintings, and present an unseen side of the great Professor. And you know, he was really rather good.

Tolkien, J. R. R., Christopher Tolkien, and Alan Lee. *The Children of Húrin*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014.

One of three central tales in his conception of his First Age of legends, and an experiment for Tolkien, *Children of Húrin* is an epic tragedy, with no eucatastrophe in sight. Dark, brooding, and tragic, on first read it was astounding to me in its uniqueness among his work. Now I can see the resonance of Turin among the other flawed heroes of legend, but this greater understanding leads only to a more mature appreciation. Fantastic cover design by Alan Lee.

Tolkien, J. R. R., Christopher Tolkien, and Alan Lee. *Beren and Lúthien*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.

The “final” of Tolkien’s posthumous works to be published under the aegis of his son Christopher, whose first-edited *Silmarillion* contained a much-abridged version of this tale. The central tale of his entire mythos, and inspired in part by his own love, the tomb Tolkien and his wife share bears the names of the titular lovers. Undergoing significant changes from its first sketching out to its last draft, no version of the tale was ever quite complete. The book presents several of these versions, its longest fragment, in epic poetic verse, cutting off heartwrenchingly just before the end. Still one of the greatest romantic tales ever composed, and with beautiful illustrations by Alan Lee. You will take my copy from my corpse.

Tolkien, J. R. R., Christopher Tolkien, and Alan Lee. *The Fall of Gondolin*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018

An unexpected gift, the third and last of the Great Tales of which there was once no hope of publication. Though greatly reduced from its ambitions through sheer unfinishedness, there is beauty in its portrayal of the death of a society, and the attendant promise of a new birth.

Zahn, Timothy. *Star Wars: Heir to the Empire*. Bantam Books, 1992.

The first of the trilogy which revived Star Wars and showed Lucas there was interest for the prequels, this book also revitalized my interest in Star Wars, and showed me that the films were but the first step into a larger world. Though the *Thrawn Trilogy* and its followup *Hand of Thrawn Duology* are now non-canon, they were influential enough to shape much of the old expanded universe, and the titular villain they introduce made the jump to the new universe as well. Thrawn’s brilliance and his misguided admiration for art and culture make for a great antagonist, and characters like the tormented, determined Mara Jade and the rebel Rebel leader Bel Iblis have an impact which still resonates in the new films and tales today. Author Timothy Zahn creates original and intriguing plots with these recognizable characters and with his own inventions, and he well deserves his Hugo award.