

THE DOOM OF KINGS

from the Lay of Leithian,

J. R. R. Tolkien transl.

Canto XII

IN that vast shadow once of yore
Fingolfin stood: his shield he bore
with field of heaven's blue and star
of crystal shining pale afar.
In overmastering wrath and hate
desperate he smote upon that gate
the Noldor king, there standing lone,
while endless fortresses of stone
engulfed the thin clear ringing keen
of silver horn on baldric green.
His hopeless challenge dauntless cried
Fingolfin there: 'Come, open wide,
dark king, your ghastly brazen doors!
Come forth, whom earth and heaven abhors!
Come forth, O monstrous craven lord,
and fight with thine own hand and sword,
thou wielder of hosts of banded thralls,
thou tyrant leaguered with strong walls,
thou foe of Gods and elvish race!
I wait thee here! Come! Show thy face!

Then Morgoth came. For the last time
in those great wars he dared to climb
from subterranean throne profound,
the rumour of his feet a sound
of rumbling earthquake underground.
Black-armoured, towering, iron-crowned
he issued forth; his mighty shield
a vast unblazoned sable field
with shadow like a thundercloud;
and o'er the gleaming king it bowed,
as huge aloft like mace he hurled
that hammer of the underworld,
Grond. Clanging to ground it tumbled
down like a thunderbolt, and crumbled
the rocks beneath it; smoke up-started,
a pit yawned, and a fire darted.

Fingolfin like a shooting light
beneath a cloud, a stab of white,
sprang then aside, and Ringil drew
like ice that gleameth cold and blue,
his sword devised of elvish skill
to pierce the flesh with deadly chill.
With seven wounds it rent his foe,
and seven mighty cries of woe
rang in the mountains, and the earth quook
and Angband's trembling armies shook.

Yet Orcs would after laughing tell
of the duel at the gates of hell;
though elvish song thereof was made
of this but one-when sad was laid
the mighty king in barrow high,
and Thorndor, Eagle of the sky,
the dreadful tidings brought and told
to mourning Elvenesse of old.
Thrice was Fingolfin with great blows
to his knees beaten, thrice he rose
still leaping up beneath the cloud
aloft to hold star-shining, proud,
his stricken shield, his Sundered helm
that dark nor might could overwhelm
till all the earth was burst and rent
in pits about him. He was spent.
His feet stumbled. He fell to wreck
upon the ground, and on his neck
a foot like rooted hills was set,
and he was crushed-not conquered yet;
one last despairing stroke he gave:
the mighty foot pale Ringil gave
about the heel, and black the blood
gushed as from smoking fount in flood.

Halt goes for ever from that stroke
great Morgoth; but the king he broke
and would have hewn and mangled thrown
to wolves devouring. Lo! from throne
that Manwë bade him build on high,
on peak unscaled beneath the sky,
Morgoth to watch, now down there swooped
Throndor the King of Eagles, stooped,
and rending beak of gold he smote
in Bauglir's face, then up did float
on pinions thirty fathoms wide
bearing away, though loud they cried
the mighty corse, the Elven-king;
and where the mountains make a ring
far to the south about that plain
where after Gondolin did reign,
embattled city, at great height
upon a dizzy snowcap white
in mounded cairn the mighty dead
he laid upon the mountain's head
Never Orc nor demon after dared
that pass to climb, o'er which there stared
Fingolfin's high and holy tomb,
till Gondolin's appointed doom.

Thus Bauglir earned the furrowed scar
that his dark countenance doth mar,
and thus his limping gait he gained;
but afterward profound he reigned
darkling upon his hidden throne;
and thunderous paced his halls of stone,
slow building there his vast design
the world in thralldom to confine.
Wielder of armies, lord of woe,
no rest now he gave he slave or foe;
his watch and ward he thrice increased,
his spies were sent from West to East
and tidings brought from all the North,
who fought, who fell; who ventured forth,
who wrought in secret; who had hoard;
if maid were fair or proud were lord;
well nigh all things he knew, all hearts
well nigh enmeshed in evil arts.

Doriath only, beyond the veil
woven by Melian, no assail
could hurt or enter, only rumour dim
of things there passing came to him.
A rumour loud and tidings clear
of other movements far and near
among his foes, and threat of war
from the seven sons of Fëanor,
from Nargothrond, from Fingon still
gathering his armies under hill
and under tree in Hithlum's shade,
these daily came. He grew afraid
amidst his power once more; renown
of Beren vexed his ears, and down
the aisled forests there was heard
great Huan baying.

