

The Races of Middle-Earth

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Illustrations by Brian Talbot

Ever since I first read "The Lord of the Rings" I have been puzzled by the variety of racial types mentioned therein, and their relationship to each other and to ourselves. Now, following my latest re-reading of the work and of "The Hobbit", I think that I have at last managed to sort them out to my reasonable satisfaction. What follows is my provisional analysis of the picture, at any rate, in its basic outline.

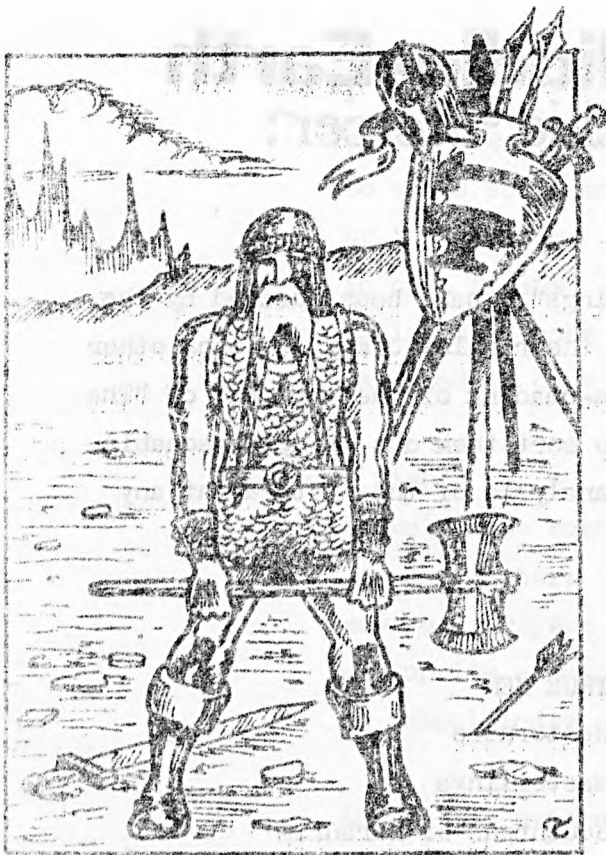


1. TRUE MEN
 - Westerners
 - Easterlings
 - Southrons or Haradrim
 - Numenoreans
 - Lo/ssoth
 - (Axe-bearers?)

This category includes all those races which I would assign to the modern species, 'Homo sapiens'. By "Westerners" I mean both the men who inhabited Middle-earth before the Numenorean take-over (for instance the Dunlendings) and those who arrived later (for instance the Rohirrim). The Easterlings and Haradrim, or Southrons, are not strictly of Middle-earth, but are included for good measure.

Likewise, the race which I've dubbed "Axe-bearers", which figures in the final stages of the War of the Ring and is described as being on the small side, bearded like dwarves, and wielding battle-axes. These seem to be distinct from ordinary Easterlings, and may in fact be more closely related to the dwarves.





2. SORT-OF MEN

Dwarves

Hobbits

Pukel-men ("wild men")

Orcs, great and small

Uruk-hai

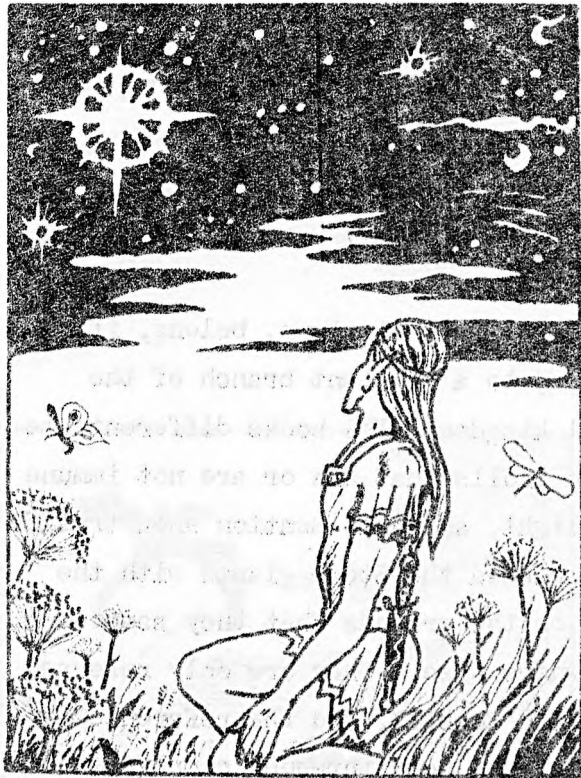
(Southern troll-men?)

(Variags?)

Here I list the races that appear to belong to the genus 'Homo', but not to the species 'sapiens' - though this is no reflection on their intelligence, but simply a matter of comparative biology. I have included the orcs in this section, partly because of the hint that they may be inter-fertile with humans, and partly because so many of today's humans tend to resemble them in behaviour - which

come to much the same thing, really. In fact, the Uruk-hai, who apparently have an admixture of human ancestry, at least could well be assigned to 'Homo sapiens', were not such an assignment contrary to Tolkien's intention. The race I refer to as "Southern troll-men" is described as being black-skinned and red-tongued and of a certain trollish aspect - I have placed it here by way of compromise, between 'Homo sapiens' on the one hand and outright trolldom on the other. The Variags lived in Khand, but since their racial name bears no resemblance to that of their country I am assuming that they were noticeably different and not simply Khandimen. Oh yes, Gollum comes in here too, because he was a Stoor and thus a hobbit.





I have also tentatively placed the River-women here. Not much is recorded about this, therefore, mysterious people, but since two individuals - a mother and her daughter - are mentioned, they, or it, would appear to qualify as a race, and one moreover of a vaguely elvish nature. Whether this race include River-men as well as River-women, or whether the women habitually took their mates from other races, or whether indeed they were parthenogenetic, is not revealed.

3. ELVES

Elves in general
(River-women?)

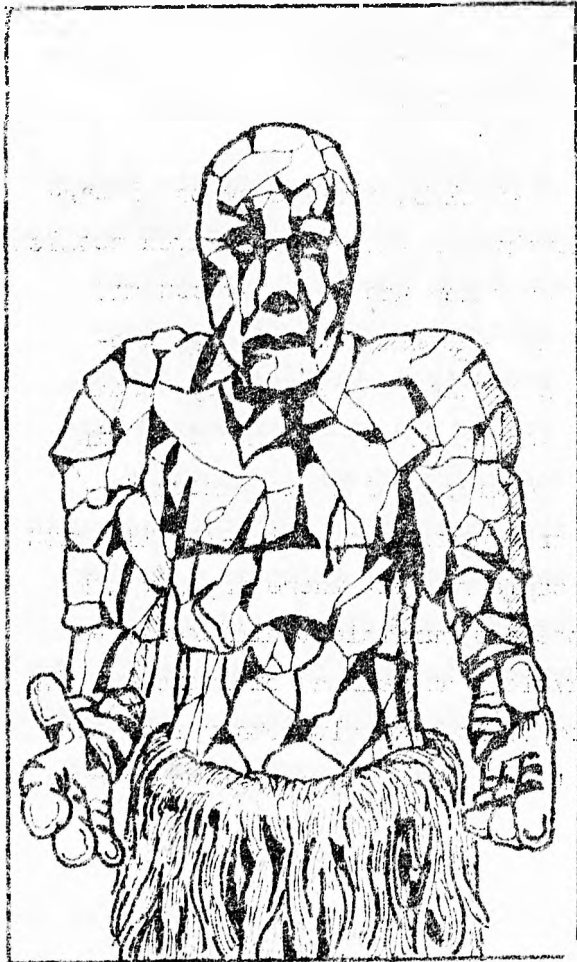
I am still bewildered by the inter-relationship of the various elven peoples so I have taken the easy way out and lumped East-elves, West-elves, High-elves, Wood-elves, Grey-elves, Sindar, Eldar, Noldor and their immediate kin under the title "Elves in general". Elves are known to be inter-fertile with 'Homo sapiens', but there is, I think, nevertheless sufficient difference - metaphysical as well as biological - for them to be removed altogether from the genus 'Homo' into a genus of their own.



4. ENTS

Ents obviously form another distinct genus - which may indeed lie outside the animal kingdom altogether and be related more closely to such types as the Huorns, the semi-sentient trees of the Old Forest, and similar manifestations of vegetablehood.

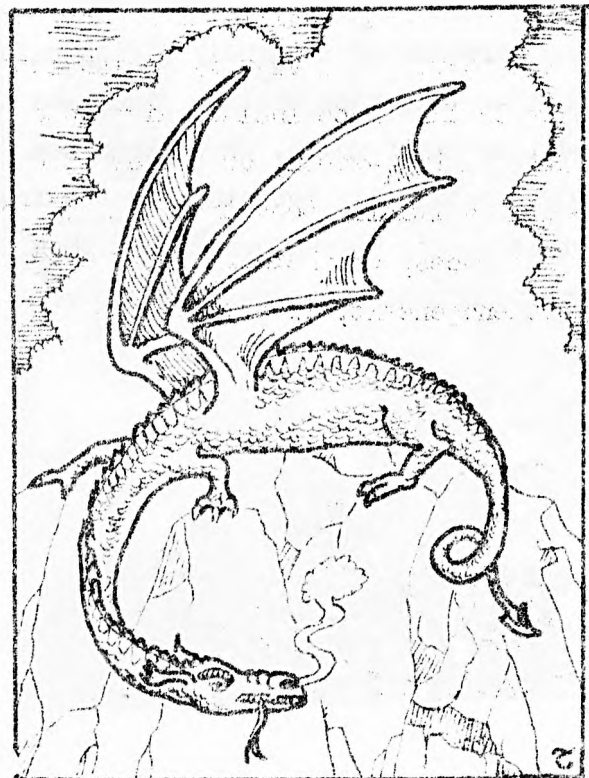




5. TROLLS ETC.
Cave trolls
Hill trolls
Snow trolls
(Stone giants?)

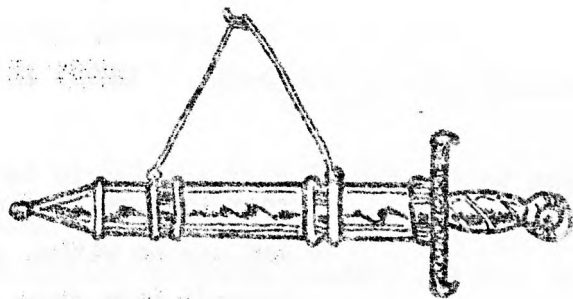
Trolls, in their turn, belong, if anywhere, to a sentient branch of the mineral kingdom. The books differentiate between trolls that are or are not immune to sunlight, and also mention snow trolls. I have placed the Stone giants with the trolls on the grounds that they seem to fit nowhere else. They are only referred to in "The Hobbit", and the reference may possibly have been intended simply as a poetic metaphor for a thunderstorm. They are further mentioned in the subsequent dialogue, however, and I have taken this to mean that the Stone giants are indeed a race.

6. TALKING BEASTS AND BIRDS
Wargs
Eagles
Ravens and other members
of the Corvidae
Dragons
Spiders of Mirkwood



And here we are back in the animal kingdom, but amongst genera heretofore unconsidered. All the species I have listed under this head can communicate with anthropoid beings in the languages of the anthropoids and/or vice versa. This list is probably far from complete, because further species of animals keep suggesting themselves - thrushes, Shelob,
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the mearas of Rohan, Beorn's tame animals; it is difficult to know where to stop. Then, of course, there is Beorn himself: as a skin-turner, possibly he belongs to Category 2, another species of the genus 'Homo'.



7. NON-RACIAL CATEGORIES

Istari
Nazgul
Bombadil
(Balrog?)

This heading is mainly a catch-all for whatever is left over. The Istari and the Nazgul have been removed by their respective superior author/ities from whatever races they once belonged to, to constitute pseudo-races that are, however, non-viable. The same might possibly be said, come to that, of Sauron himself. Bombadil is strictly a 'one-off' type - although he has taken a mate from among the river-women, there is no record of his having bred from her, or from anyone else. And I am assuming that a Balrog, whatever its nature (animal, vegetable, mineral or abstract) is a special creation incapable of furthering its line.

There are doubtless other races and possible-races that I have overlooked; at times one seems to stumble on a new one on every other page or so. However, I offer the above analysis as a sincere attempt to reduce the racial situation in Middle-earth to some sort of coherent order.

((Anything in the above analysis that is followed by a question-mark and is in brackets is not so definitely in the category I suggest for it as are the unpunctuated races.

- Archie Mercer.))