
Linguistic Foolery

Everyday Elves and What They Do

By Darth Fingon

Among all the tales of kings and princes that Tolkien provided, it's easy to forget that, if we look at things logically, the world of Arda must have been populated by a vast array of regular old everyday Elves doing regular old everyday things. Not every Noldo in Valinor was a prince, stonemason, or some manner of smith. Not every Sinda in Beleriand was a hunter, warrior, or minstrel. In order to keep society running in large cities such as Tirion and Gondolin, countless others had to have been working in unglamorous jobs behind the scenes. So what exactly did they do? Pretty much what you'd expect people to do in any historical society. Here's a collection of words from Tolkien's lexicons describing what daily life may have been like for those overlooked Elves.

Those Who Make Food

Food begins with vegetables, grains, and animals, which means we'll need gardeners and farmers. Words for garden and farmer are both given, along with a whole list of words for crops and domesticated animals. [See the article on Elvish Food](#) for more detail. We also have words for plough and reap, along with mill and flour, so we can add miller to the list of everyday Elven jobs. For those who raise animals, the word for shepherd is given. And, since we have words for meat and food that comes from animals, we'll have to assume that butchers figure in there somewhere. Finally, Elves love their wine, and if there's a word for that, somebody has to make it.

Household Goods

Elves raised sheep, and they sheared those sheep to make wool. Words are provided for shearing, spinning, and weaving, so we need shearers, spinners, and weavers. Probably also dyers and tailors to make the various articles of clothing Elves are known to have. Elves also have shoes and hats, which require cobblers and hatters. To keep themselves clean, they have baths and soap, and that soap doesn't make itself. Neither do the candles and lamps that light Elven homes. There is an attested word for lampwright in Sindarin.

A Sindarin word also exists for potter, so there's somebody who can make earthenware bowls and jugs. I could find no word for glassworkers, but glass couldn't exist without them, so they have to be around. Other wordlist items include paper, books, leather, and ointment, all of which must be manufactured.

Now that we have people to make all the things the Elves need in their daily lives, we need to find somebody to sell the goods. Luckily, the Qenya Lexicon provides words for pedlar and huckster. Just in case you thought all Elves were honest traders. Other attested words include barter, bargain, and words for silver and gold coins.

Housing & Infrastructure

A Sindarin word for carpenter exists, so there's one important job down and Elves can have houses. But we also need somebody to make furniture for those houses, since we have words for bed, couch, table, and more. On a grander scale, the city itself must be built and maintained, which requires a whole workforce from engineers down to grunt labourers. It just so happens that there's a word for menial labour and work. We have words for things like aqueducts, canals, and bridges, and somebody can build them.

Entertainment

Here's a field that usually does have some representation in fanfiction, though there's much more to the Elven entertainment field than singing and harping. Apart from musicians playing a wide variety of instruments from flutes to drums, Elves can also be dancers and poets.

Law and Crime

You may remember that the word for lawyer showed up on the [22 Words You Never Thought Tolkien Would Provide](#) list, as well as a word for legal action. Who do the lawyers take legal action against? Criminals. If the above-listed careers seem too mainstream, every large city needs thieves. The Qenya Lexicon has even gone so far as to differentiate between robbery (by violent means) and thievery (by stealth). And if thieves and lawyers and legal action all exist, we'll also need some manner of police force and a prison to enforce the law.

Religion and Spirituality

The applicability of these words to Elven life is debatable, but I wanted to include them as options anyhow just for the fun of it. Some of these also appeared in the [22 Words](#) article. If a religious life is what your Elves desire, they might become monks or nuns. Or they could simply be sinners. Further career options include witch and wizard, of good magic or bad.