

Father of Fantasy Fiction: J.R.R. Tolkien [B2]

Erudito linguista dal carattere scontroso, con la sua immaginazione pose le basi del genere fantastico e costruì un universo mitologico che sarebbe poi diventato uno dei marchi più redditizi dell'industria dell'intrattenimento.



The world's most famous writer of high fantasy fiction, J. R. R. Tolkien, was born in 1892. He lost both his parents before he was thirteen, leaving him [the ward](#) of a Catholic [priest](#), a family friend. As a teenager, he [mastered](#) Latin and Greek, and even invented his own languages. In 1915, he went to France to fight in the First World War – during which he lost most of his friends. One year later, he married his childhood [sweetheart](#), Edith Bratt, another orphan.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY

Tolkien had received a [degree](#) in Old English in 1911 from Oxford University. In 1925, after years of working in the field, he won the prestigious [chair](#) of Anglo-Saxon at the same university. He would teach there for the next thirty-four years. His life, however, changed forever in 1928. Inspired by myths and legends, Tolkien had spent years writing fantasy [tales](#) set in worlds of his

own creation, [to amuse](#) himself and his four children. [Grading](#) exams one day, he [came across](#) a [blank](#) page and suddenly wrote what would become one of the most famous opening lines in English literature: “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit”.

THE HOBBIT

Tolkien went on to create a story about a short, [furry-footed](#) creature called ‘a hobbit’, who lives in a fantasy world called [Middle-earth](#), peopled by humans, [elves](#), [dwarves](#), trolls, orcs and hobbits. The hobbit, Bilbo Baggins, joins a [quest](#) for a dragon’s treasure. The Hobbit, published in 1937, was a success with both adults and children, surprising both Tolkien and the publisher, who asked for a sequel.

TOLKIEN’S MASTERPIECE

Tolkien then spent twelve years writing what would be his masterpiece, The Lord of the Rings. The writer [intended](#) the book (published in parts in 1954 and 1955), complete with invented languages and cultures as part of the same fantasy world of [Middle-earth](#), to be a mythology for England. A battle between good and evil, the book tells the tale of a group of hobbits trying to destroy the One Ring that the evil Dark Lord Sauron wants to use to conquer [Middle-earth](#).

“The significance of a myth is not to be [pinned](#) by analytical reasoning. For it is alive [at once](#) and in all its parts, and dies before it can be [dissected](#)”.

HUGE GLOBAL SUCCESS

The Lord of the Rings has now sold more than 250 million copies in thirty languages. Numerous British [polls](#) have voted it the best book of the 20th century. Fantasy authors such as J. K. Rowling, Terry Pratchett and George R. R. Martin have followed Tolkien, their literary father, by creating their own imaginary worlds. Director Peter Jackson’s film version twenty years ago

made an incredible \$2.9 billion. The three Hobbit films also made \$2.9 billion. Forbes magazine has declared Tolkien the third-highest-earning dead celebrity after Michael Jackson and Elvis Presley. Tolkien's genius [lives on](#).

Glossary

- **degree** = titolo, laurea
- **to amuse** = divertire
- **blank** = bianco
- **Grading** = correggere
- **dwarves** = nani
- **intended** = intendere
- **pinned** = fissare
- **dissected** = dissezionare
- **polls** = sondaggi
- **tales** = racconti
- **furry-footed** = dai piedi pelosi
- **elves** = elfi
- **lives on** = permanere
- **the ward** = essere sotto la tutela
- **priest** = sacerdote
- **mastered** = dominare
- **sweetheart** = amore
- **chair** = cattedra
- **came across** = imbattersi
- **Middle-earth** = Terra di Mezzo
- **quest** = ricerca
- **at once** = contemporaneamente