

The Lord of the Rings

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This article is about the novel. For other uses, see [The Lord of the Rings \(disambiguation\)](#).

The Lord of the Rings



Tolkien's own cover designs for the three volumes

Volumes:

[*The Fellowship of the Ring*](#)

[*The Two Towers*](#)

[*The Return of the King*](#)

Author	J. R. R. Tolkien
Country	England
Language	English
Genre	High fantasy Adventure
Publisher	George Allen & Unwin
Published	21 July 1954 and October 1955
Media type	Print (hardback and paperback)
Preceded by	The Hobbit

The Lord of the Rings is an [epic high fantasy](#) novel written by English [philologist](#) and [University of Oxford](#) professor [J. R. R. Tolkien](#). The story began as a sequel to Tolkien's earlier, less complex children's fantasy novel *[The Hobbit](#)* (1937), but eventually developed into a much larger work. It was written in stages between 1937 and 1949, much of it during [World War II](#).^[1] It is the [third best-selling novel ever written](#), with over 150 million copies sold.^[2]

The title of the novel refers to the story's main [antagonist](#), the Dark Lord [Sauron](#)^[note 1], who had in an earlier age [created the One Ring](#) to rule the other [Rings of Power](#) as the ultimate weapon in his campaign to conquer and rule all of [Middle-earth](#). From quiet beginnings in the [Shire](#), a [Hobbit](#) land not unlike the English countryside, the story ranges across north-west Middle-earth, following the course of the [War of the Ring](#) through the eyes of its characters, notably the hobbits [Frodo Baggins](#), [Samwise "Sam" Gamgee](#), [Meriadoc "Merry" Brandybuck](#) and [Peregrin "Pippin" Took](#), but also the hobbits' chief allies and travelling companions: [Aragorn](#), a Human [Ranger](#); [Boromir](#), a man from [Gondor](#); [Gimli](#), a [Dwarf](#) warrior; [Legolas](#), an Elven prince; and [Gandalf](#), a Wizard.

The work was initially intended by Tolkien to be one volume of a two-volume set, with the other being [The Silmarillion](#), but this idea was dismissed by his publisher.^{[4][5]} It was decided for economic reasons to publish *The Lord of the Rings* as three volumes over the course of a year from 21 July 1954 to October 1955, thus creating the now familiar *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.^{[4][6]} The three volumes were entitled [The Fellowship of the Ring](#), [The Two Towers](#), and [The Return of the King](#). Structurally, the novel is divided internally into six books, two per volume, with several appendices of background material included at the end of the third volume. *The Lord of the Rings* has since been reprinted numerous times and [translated into many languages](#).

Tolkien's work has been the subject of [extensive analysis of its themes](#) and origins. Although a major work in itself, the story was only the last movement of a larger epic Tolkien had worked on since 1917, in a process he described as [mythopoeia](#).^[7] Influences on this earlier work, and on the story of *The Lord of the Rings*, include philology, mythology, religion and the author's distaste for the effects of [industrialization](#), as well as earlier fantasy works and Tolkien's experiences in [World War I](#).^[11] *The Lord of the Rings* in its turn is considered to have had a great effect on modern fantasy; the impact of Tolkien's works is such that the use of the words "Tolkienian" and "Tolkienesque" has been recorded in the [Oxford English Dictionary](#).^[8]

The enduring popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* has led to numerous references in popular culture, the founding of many societies by [fans of Tolkien's works](#),^[9] and the publication of many books about Tolkien and his works. *The Lord of the Rings* has [inspired, and continues to inspire](#), artwork, music, films and television, [video games](#), and subsequent literature. Award-winning [adaptations of The Lord of the Rings](#) have been made for [radio](#), [theatre](#), and [film](#).^[10]

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[\[edit\]](#) Synopsis

The Lord of the Rings

[Volume I](#) · [Volume II](#) · [Volume III](#)

Long before the events of the novel, the Dark Lord [Sauron](#) forges the [One Ring](#) to dominate the other [Rings of Power](#) and corrupt those who wear them: the leaders of [Men](#), [Elves](#) and [Dwarves](#). He is defeated in battle, and [Isildur](#) cuts the One Ring from Sauron's finger, claiming it as an heirloom for his line. Isildur is later ambushed and killed by [Orcs](#), and the Ring is lost in the River [Anduin](#). Over two thousand years later, the Ring is found by a river-dwelling hobbit called [Déagol](#). His relative^[1] [Sméagol](#) strangles him to acquire it, and is banished for his crime. Sméagol hides under the [Misty Mountains](#), where the Ring extends his lifespan and transforms him over the course of hundreds of years into a twisted, corrupted creature called [Gollum](#). He loses the Ring and, as recounted in *The Hobbit*, [Bilbo Baggins](#) finds it. Meanwhile, Sauron remanifests in a new physical form and reoccupies his old realm of [Mordor](#). Gollum sets out in search of the Ring, but is captured by Sauron, who learns from him that Bilbo Baggins now has it. Gollum is set loose and Sauron, who needs the Ring to regain his full power, sends forth the [Ringwraiths](#), his powerful servants, to seize it.

The novel begins in [the Shire](#), with the [hobbit Frodo Baggins](#) inheriting the Ring from Bilbo, his cousin^[note 2] and guardian. Both are unaware of its origin, but [Gandalf the Grey](#), a [wizard](#) and old friend of Bilbo, suspects the Ring's identity. When he becomes certain, he advises Frodo to take it away from the Shire. Frodo leaves, accompanied by his gardener and friend, [Samwise \("Sam"\) Gamgee](#), and two cousins, [Meriadoc \("Merry"\) Brandybuck](#) and [Peregrin \("Pippin"\) Took](#). They nearly encounter the Ringwraiths while still in the Shire, but shake off pursuit by cutting through the [Old Forest](#), where they are aided by the enigmatic [Tom Bombadil](#), who alone is unaffected by the Ring's corrupting influence. After leaving the forest, they stop in the town of [Bree](#), where they meet [Aragorn](#), Isildur's heir. Though initially distrusted, he joins them as guide and protector. They flee from Bree after narrowly escaping another assault, but the Ringwraiths follow and attack them on the hill of [Weathertop](#), wounding Frodo with a Morgul blade. Aragorn leads the hobbits toward the Elven refuge of [Rivendell](#), while Frodo gradually succumbs to the wound. The Ringwraiths nearly overtake Frodo at the Ford of [Bruinen](#), but flood waters summoned by [Elrond](#), master of Rivendell, rise up and overwhelm them.

Frodo recovers in Rivendell under the care of Elrond. The [Council of Elrond](#) reveals much significant history about Sauron and the Ring, as well as the news that Sauron has corrupted Gandalf's fellow wizard, [Saruman](#). The Council decides that the best course of action is to destroy the Ring, which can only be done by returning it to the flames of [Mount Doom](#) in Mordor, where it was forged. Frodo volunteers to take on the daunting task, and a "[Fellowship of the Ring](#)" is formed to aid him: Sam, Merry, Pippin, Aragorn, Gandalf, [Gimli](#) the Dwarf, [Legolas](#) the Elf, and the man [Boromir](#), son of the Ruling Steward [Denethor](#) of the realm of [Gondor](#).

After a failed attempt to cross the Misty Mountains via the pass below [Caradhras](#), the company are forced to try a more perilous path through the [Mines of Moria](#). There, they are attacked by Orcs and the [Watcher in the Water](#). Gandalf casts an ancient, powerful [Balrog](#) into a chasm, but is himself dragged in. The others escape and take refuge in the Elven forest of [Lothlórien](#), where they are counseled by the Lady [Galadriel](#) and [Celeborn](#).

With boats and gifts from Galadriel, the company then travel down the River [Anduin](#) to the hill of [Amon Hen](#). Boromir succumbs to the lure of the Ring and attempts to take it. Frodo flees to continue the quest alone, though Sam guesses his intent and comes along. Meanwhile, Orcs sent by Sauron and Saruman kill Boromir and kidnap Merry and Pippin.

After agonizing over which pair of hobbits to follow, Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas pursue the Orcs bearing Merry and Pippin to Sarumen. In the kingdom of [Rohan](#), the Orcs are slain by the [Rohirrim](#). Merry and Pippin escape into [Fangorn](#) Forest, where they are befriended by [Treebeard](#), the oldest of the tree-like [Ents](#). Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas track the hobbits to Fangorn, but find not the hobbits but Gandalf, resurrected after his battle with the Balrog and reborn as the significantly more powerful "Gandalf the White". Gandalf assures them that Merry and Pippin are safe, and they travel instead to rouse [Théoden](#), King of Rohan, from a stupor of despair, and to aid the Rohirrim in a stand against Saruman's now unleashed armies. Théoden travels to the ancient fortress of [Helm's Deep](#) along with Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli, while Gandalf rides off to gather more soldiers. [Helm's Deep](#) is besieged by Saruman's forces, but Gandalf and reinforcements arrive just in time to rout the enemy.

Meanwhile, the Ents, roused from their customarily peaceful ways by Merry and Pippin, attack Sarumen's stronghold of [Isengard](#), trapping the wizard in the tower of [Orthanc](#). Gandalf, Théoden and the others arrive and confront Saruman. When Saruman rejects Gandalf's offer of redemption, Gandalf strips him of his rank and most of his powers. Merry and Pippin rejoin the others. Pippin is drawn to look into a [palantír](#), a seeing-stone that Saruman had used to communicate with Sauron. This leads Sauron to think that Pippin is the Ring-bearer and that Saruman has captured him. For Pippin's protection, Gandalf takes him along to the kingdom of Gondor.

Frodo and Sam capture Gollum, who had been following them from Moria, and force him to guide them to Mordor. Finding Mordor's main gate impassable, they travel instead to a secret pass known to Gollum. Gollum betrays Frodo by leading him to the great spider [Shelob](#) in the tunnels of [Cirith Ungol](#). Frodo is felled by Shelob's bite, but Sam fights her off. Sam takes the Ring and leaves Frodo, believing him to be dead. When Orcs find Frodo, Sam overhears them say that Frodo is in fact only unconscious. Sam determines to rescue him from the tower of Cirith Ungol.

Sauron unleashes a military assault upon [Gondor](#). Gandalf arrives with Pippin at the city of [Minas Tirith](#) to alert Denethor of the impending attack. The city is [besieged](#), and Denethor, under the influence of Sauron through another [palantír](#), despairs and commits suicide, nearly taking his remaining son [Faramir](#) with him. With time running out, Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli take the [Paths of the Dead](#), where Aragorn raises an undead army of oath-breakers bound by an ancient curse. The ghostly army help them to defeat the [Corsairs of Umbar](#) invading southern Gondor. The forces now freed from the south and Rohan's cavalry break the siege of Minas Tirith.

Sam rescues Frodo from Cirith Ungol, and they cross Mordor. The mental weight of the Ring's influence weakens Frodo more and more as they near Mount Doom, but he is aided by Sam. Meanwhile, in order to distract Sauron from his true peril, Aragorn leads the remaining Gondorian and Rohirrim soldiers in a march on the [Black Gate](#) of Mordor. In the climactic battle, the vastly outnumbered alliance of Gondor and Rohan fight desperately against Sauron's armies. At the edge of the [Cracks of Doom](#), Frodo is unable to resist the Ring any longer, and claims it for himself. Gollum suddenly reappears, struggles with Frodo and bites off his finger, Ring and all. Celebrating wildly, Gollum falls into the fire, taking the Ring with him. With the destruction of the One Ring, Sauron perishes along with the Ringwraiths, and his armies are thrown into confusion.

With the end of the War of the Ring, Aragorn is crowned Elessar, King of Arnor and Gondor, and marries his longtime love, [Arwen](#), daughter of Elrond.

Saruman escapes from Isengard and enslaves the Shire. The four hobbits, upon returning home, raise a rebellion and overthrow him. Saruman is killed by his servant, [Gríma Wormtongue](#), who is in turn killed by hobbit archers. The War of the Ring thus comes to its true end on Frodo's very doorstep. Merry and Pippin are acclaimed heroes, and Sam marries [Rosie Cotton](#), and uses his gifts from Galadriel to restore the Shire. Frodo, however, remains wounded in body and spirit after his difficult journey bearing the weight of the One Ring. Some years later, accompanied by Bilbo and Gandalf, he sails from the [Grey Havens](#) west over the Sea to the [Undying Lands](#) to find peace. After Rosie's death, Sam gives his daughter the [Red Book of Westmarch](#), containing the story and adventures of Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Pippin and Merry. Sam is then said to have himself crossed west over the Sea, the last of the Ring-bearers, though his ultimate fate remains unknown.

[\[edit\]](#) Main characters

Protagonists:

- [Frodo Baggins](#), a well-to-do [hobbit](#) from [the Shire](#), who inherits the [One Ring](#) from Bilbo. Frodo is responsible for destroying the Ring in the fire of Mount Doom.
- [Samwise Gamgee](#), gardener for the Bagginses, who accompanies Frodo on the quest to destroy the Ring.
- [Meriadoc Brandybuck](#), or Merry, Frodo's cousin and companion in the Fellowship.
- [Peregrin Took](#), Pip or Pippin, Frodo's cousin and companion in the Fellowship.
- [Gandalf](#), a [wizard](#), who aids Frodo in his quest. A Maia sent by the Valar to contest Sauron.
- [Aragorn](#), descendant of [Isildur](#) and rightful heir to the thrones of [Arnor](#) and [Gondor](#).
- [Legolas](#), an elf prince, who aids Frodo and the Fellowship. Son of King [Thranduil](#) of [Mirkwood](#) and friend of the dwarf [Gimli](#).
- [Gimli](#), son of [Glóin](#), a dwarf included in the Fellowship.
- [Denethor](#), ruling Steward of Gondor and Lord of Minas Tirith.
- [Boromir](#), the eldest son of Denethor and member of the Fellowship. He tries to take the ring from Frodo by force.
- [Faramir](#), younger brother of Boromir and not favoured by Denethor. He is given the same choice as his brother Boromir: take the ring by force or let Frodo continue his quest.
- [Elrond](#), lord of Rivendell and father to Arwen Undomiel.
- [Bilbo Baggins](#), Frodo's adoptive uncle.

- [Théoden](#), King of [Rohan](#).
- [Éomer](#), the 3rd Marshal of the Mark, Théoden's nephew. Later King of Rohan after Théoden's death.
- [Éowyn](#), sister of Éomer, who disguises herself as a male warrior named Dernhelm to fight beside Théoden.
- [Treebeard](#), an Ent, who rescues Meriadoc and Pippin from orcs and who helps to turn the tide of battle.

Antagonists:

- [Sauron](#), the Dark Lord and titular Lord of the Rings, a fallen [maia](#) who helped the Elves forge the Rings of Power long ago. He forged the One Ring in secret to control all the other Rings of Power.
- The [Nazgûl](#) or Ringwraiths, nine servants of Sauron. Kings of old, they were enslaved to the One Ring through nine of the Rings of Power.
- The [Witch-king of Angmar](#), the Lord of the Nazgûl, and Sauron's most powerful servant, who commands Sauron's army.
- [Saruman](#), a corrupted [wizard](#) who seeks the One Ring for himself. Brainwashed by Sauron through over use of the Palantir. A Maia sent by the Valar to contest Sauron.
- [Gríma Wormtongue](#), a servant of Saruman, a go-between from Saruman to Théoden who poisons Théoden's perceptions with well placed "advice".
- [Gollum](#) (named *Sméagol* in earlier life), who formerly possessed the One Ring, which turned him to evil and gave him unnaturally long life.

[\[edit\]](#) Concept and creation

[\[edit\]](#) Background

The Lord of the Rings started as a sequel to J. R. R. Tolkien's earlier work, [The Hobbit](#), published in 1937.^[12] The popularity of *The Hobbit* had led George Allen & Unwin, the publishers, to request a sequel. Tolkien warned them that he wrote quite slowly, and responded with several stories he had already developed. Having rejected his contemporary drafts for [The Silmarillion](#), putting on hold [Roverandom](#), and accepting [Farmer Giles of Ham](#), Allen & Unwin thought more stories about hobbits would be popular.^[13] So at the age of 45, Tolkien began writing the story that would become *The Lord of the Rings*. The story would not be finished until 12 years later, in 1949, and would not be fully published until 1955, when Tolkien was 63 years old.

[\[edit\]](#) Writing

Persuaded by his publishers, he started "a new Hobbit" in December 1937.^[12] After several false starts, the story of the One Ring emerged. The idea for the first chapter ("A Long-Expected Party") arrived fully formed, although the reasons behind Bilbo's disappearance, the significance of the Ring, and the title *The Lord of the Rings* did not arrive until the spring of 1938.^[12] Originally, he planned to write a story in which Bilbo had used up all his treasure and was looking for another adventure to gain more; however, he remembered the Ring and its powers and decided to write about that instead.^[12]

Writing was slow, due to Tolkien having a full-time academic position, and needing to earn further money as a university [examiner](#).^[14] Tolkien abandoned *The Lord of the Rings* during most of 1943 and only re-started it in April 1944,^[12] as a serial for his son [Christopher Tolkien](#), who was sent chapters as they were written while he was serving in South Africa with the [Royal Air Force](#). Tolkien made another concerted effort in 1946, and showed the manuscript to his publishers in 1947.^[12] The story was effectively finished the next year, but Tolkien did not complete the revision of earlier parts of the work until 1949.^[12]

[\[edit\]](#) Influences



Mentioned at the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, the Ivy Bush^[15] is the closest public house to [Birmingham Oratory](#) which Tolkien attended while living near [Edgbaston Reservoir](#). [Perrott's Folly](#) is nearby.

Main article: [J. R. R. Tolkien's influences](#)

The Lord of the Rings developed as a personal exploration by Tolkien of his interests in [philology](#), religion (particularly [Roman Catholicism](#)^[16]), [fairy tales](#), [Norse](#) and general [Germanic mythology](#),^{[17][18]} and also [Celtic](#),^[19] [Slavic](#),^{[20][21][22]} [Persian](#),^[23] [Greek](#),^[24] and [Finnish mythology](#).^[25] Tolkien acknowledged, and external critics have verified, the influences of [George MacDonald](#) and [William Morris](#)^[26] and the [Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*](#).^[27] The question of a direct influence of [Wagner's *The Ring Cycle*](#) on Tolkien's work is [often debated by critics](#).

Tolkien included neither any explicit religion nor cult in his work. Rather the themes, moral philosophy, and cosmology of the Lord of the Rings reflect his Catholic worldview. In one of his letters Tolkien states, "The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism."^[16]

Some locations and characters were inspired by Tolkien's childhood in [Birmingham](#), where he first lived near [Sarehole Mill](#), and later near [Edgbaston Reservoir](#).^[28] There are also hints of the [Black Country](#), which is within easy reach of north west Edgbaston. This shows in such names as "Underhill", and the description of Saruman's industrialization of Isengard and The Shire. It has also been suggested that [The Shire](#) and its surroundings were based on the countryside around [Stonyhurst College](#) in [Lancashire](#) where Tolkien frequently stayed during the 1940s.^[29] The work was influenced by the effects of his military service during [World War I](#), to the point that Frodo has been "diagnosed" as suffering from [Posttraumatic Stress](#)

[Disorder](#), or "shell-shock," which was first diagnosed at the Battle of the Somme, at which Tolkien served.^[30]

[edit] Publication history

A dispute with his publisher, [George Allen & Unwin](#), led to the book being offered to [Collins](#) in 1950. Tolkien intended [The Silmarillion](#) (itself largely unrevised at this point) to be published along with *The Lord of the Rings*, but A&U were unwilling to do this. After his contact at Collins, Milton Waldman, expressed the belief that *The Lord of the Rings* itself "urgently wanted cutting", he eventually demanded that they publish the book in 1952.^[31] They did not; and so Tolkien wrote to Allen and Unwin, saying, "I would gladly consider the publication of any part of the stuff."^[12]

For publication, the book was divided into three volumes: [The Fellowship of the Ring](#) (Books I, *The Ring Sets Out*, and II, *The Ring Goes South*), [The Two Towers](#) (Books III, *The Treason of Isengard*, and IV, *The Ring Goes East*), and [The Return of the King](#) (Books V, *The War of the Ring*, and VI, *The End of the Third Age*, plus six appendices). This was due largely to post-war paper shortages, as well as being a way to keep down the price of the book. Delays in producing appendices, maps and especially indices led to the volumes being published later than originally hoped — on 21 July 1954, on 11 November 1954 and on 20 October 1955 respectively in the United Kingdom, and slightly later in the United States. *The Return of the King* was especially delayed. Tolkien, moreover, did not especially like the title *The Return of the King*, believing it gave away too much of the storyline. He had originally suggested [The War of the Ring](#), which was dismissed by his publishers.^[32]

The books were published under a profit-sharing arrangement, whereby Tolkien would not receive an advance or royalties until the books had broken even, after which he would take a large share of the profits.^[33] It has ultimately become the third best-selling novel ever written, with over 150 million copies sold.^[2] Only [A Tale of Two Cities](#) by [Charles Dickens](#) and [The Little Prince](#) by [Antoine de Saint-Exupéry](#) have sold more copies worldwide (over 200 million each) while the fourth best-selling novel is Tolkien's [The Hobbit](#).^{[34][35][36]}

[edit] Editions and revisions

In the early 1960s [Donald A. Wollheim](#), [science fiction](#) editor of the paperback publisher [Ace Books](#), claimed that *The Lord of the Rings* was not protected in the United States under [American copyright law](#) because [Houghton Mifflin](#), the U.S. hardcover publisher, had neglected to copyright the work in the United States.^{[37][38]} Ace Books then proceeded to publish an edition, unauthorized by Tolkien and without paying [royalties](#) to him. Tolkien took issue with this and quickly notified his fans of this objection.^[39] [Grass-roots](#) pressure from these fans became so great that Ace Books withdrew their edition and made a nominal payment to Tolkien.^{[40][41]} Authorized editions followed from [Ballantine Books](#) and [Houghton Mifflin](#) to tremendous commercial success. By the mid-1960s the novel had become a cultural phenomenon. Tolkien undertook various textual revisions to produce a version of the book that would be published with his consent and establish an unquestioned US copyright. This text became the Second Edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, published in 1965.^[40] Houghton Mifflin editions after 1994 consolidate variant revisions by Tolkien, and corrections supervised by [Christopher Tolkien](#), which resulted, after some initial glitches, in a computer-based unified text.^[42]

[[edit](#)] Posthumous publication of drafts

From 1988 to 1992 Christopher Tolkien published the surviving drafts of *The Lord of The Rings*, chronicling and illuminating with commentary the stages of the text's development, in volumes 6–9 of his [History of Middle-earth](#) series. The four volumes carry the titles [The Return of the Shadow](#), [The Treason of Isengard](#), [The War of the Ring](#), and [Sauron Defeated](#).

[[edit](#)] Translations

Main article: [Translations of The Lord of the Rings](#)

The novel has been translated, with various degrees of success, into at least 38 other languages.^[43] Tolkien, an expert in [philology](#), examined many of these translations, and made comments on each that reflect both the translation process and his work. As he was unhappy with some choices made by early translators, such as the [Swedish translation](#) by [Åke Ohlmarks](#),^[44] Tolkien wrote a "[Guide to the Names in The Lord of the Rings](#)" (1967). Because *The Lord of the Rings* purports to be a translation of the fictitious [Red Book of Westmarch](#), with the English language representing the [Westron](#) of the "original", Tolkien suggested that translators attempt to capture the interplay between English and the invented nomenclature of the English work, and gave several examples along with general guidance.

[[edit](#)] Reception

Main article: [Reception of J. R. R. Tolkien](#)

The Lord of the Rings has received mixed reviews since its inception, ranging from terrible to excellent. Recent reviews in various media have been, on the whole, highly positive and Tolkien's literary achievement is slowly being acknowledged as a significant one. On its initial review the [Sunday Telegraph](#) felt it was "among the greatest works of imaginative fiction of the twentieth century."^[45] The [Sunday Times](#) seemed to echo these sentiments when in its review it was stated that "the English-speaking world is divided into those who have read *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* and those who are going to read them."^[45] The [New York Herald Tribune](#) also seemed to have an idea of how popular the books would become, writing in its review that they were "destined to outlast our time."^[46] [W. H. Auden](#), an admirer of Tolkien's writings, regarded *The Lord of the Rings* as a "masterpiece", further stating that in some cases it outdid the achievement of [John Milton's Paradise Lost](#).^[47]

New York Times reviewer Judith Shulevitz criticized the "pedantry" of Tolkien's literary style, saying that he "formulated a high-minded belief in the importance of his mission as a literary preservationist, which turns out to be death to literature itself."^[48] Critic Richard Jenkyns, writing in [The New Republic](#), criticized the work for a lack of psychological depth. Both the characters and the work itself are, according to Jenkyns, "anemic, and lacking in fibre."^[49] Even within Tolkien's literary group, [The Inklings](#), reviews were mixed. [Hugo Dyson](#) complained loudly at its readings, and [Christopher Tolkien](#) records Dyson as "lying on the couch, and lolling and shouting and saying, 'Oh God, not another Elf!'"^{[50][51]} However, another Inkling, [C. S. Lewis](#), had very different feelings, writing, "here are beauties which pierce like swords or burn like cold iron. Here is a book which will break your heart." Despite these reviews and its lack of paperback printing until the 1960s, *The Lord of the Rings* initially sold well in hardback.^[7]

In 1957, *The Lord of the Rings* was awarded the [International Fantasy Award](#). Despite its numerous detractors, the publication of the [Ace Books](#) and [Ballantine](#) paperbacks helped *The Lord of the Rings* become immensely popular in the United States in the 1960s. The book has remained so ever since, ranking as one of the most popular works of fiction of the twentieth century, judged by both sales and reader surveys.^[52] In the 2003 "[Big Read](#)" survey conducted in Britain by the BBC, *The Lord of the Rings* was found to be the "Nation's best-loved book." In similar 2004 polls both Germany^[53] and Australia^[54] also found *The Lord of the Rings* to be their favourite book. In a 1999 poll of [Amazon.com](#) customers, *The Lord of the Rings* was judged to be their favourite "book of the century."^[55] *The Lord of the Rings* was awarded the [Prometheus Hall of Fame Award](#) in 2009.

Ethan Gilsdorf, writing for [The Boston Globe](#), commented that while there are movements within academia to approach *The Lord of the Rings* as a serious literary work, the 2001–2003 film trilogy has contributed to a [dumbing down](#) of the reception of the novel by the forces of mass-commercialization.^[56]

[\[edit\]](#) Themes

Main article: [Themes of The Lord of the Rings](#)

Although *The Lord of the Rings* was published in the 1950s, Tolkien insisted that the One Ring was not an [allegory](#) for the [Atomic Bomb](#),^[57] nor were his works a strict allegory of any kind, but were open to interpretation as the reader saw fit.^{[58][59]}

A few critics have found what they consider to be racial elements in the story, generally based upon their views of how Tolkien's imagery depicts good and evil, characters' race (e.g. Elf, Dwarf, Hobbit, [Southron](#), [Númenórean](#), Orc); and that the character's race is seen as determining their behaviour.^{[60][61][62]} Counter-arguments note that race-focused critiques often omit relevant textual evidence to the contrary,^{[63][64][65]} cite imagery from adaptations rather than the work itself,^[66] ignore the absence of evidence of racist attitudes or events in the author's personal life^{[63][66][67]} and claim that the perception of racism is itself a marginal view.^[67]

Critics have also seen [social class](#) rather than race as being the determinant factor for the portrayal of good and evil.^[63] Commentators such as [science fiction](#) author [David Brin](#) have interpreted the work to hold unquestioning devotion to a traditional [elitist](#) social structure.^[68] In his essay "[Epic Pooh](#)", science fiction and fantasy author [Michael Moorcock](#) critiques the world-view displayed by the book as deeply [conservative](#), in both the 'paternalism' of the narrative voice and the power-structures in the narrative.^[69] [Tom Shippey](#) cites the origin of this portrayal of evil as a reflection of the prejudices of European middle-classes during the inter-war years towards the industrial working class.^[70]

The book has been read as fitting the model of [Joseph Campbell](#)'s "[monomyth](#)".^[71]

[\[edit\]](#) Adaptations

Main article: [Adaptations of The Lord of the Rings](#)

The Lord of the Rings has been adapted for film, radio and stage.

The book has been adapted for radio four times. In 1955 and 1956, the [BBC](#) broadcast *The Lord of the Rings*, a 12-part radio adaptation of the story. In the 1960s radio station [WBAI](#) produced a short [radio adaptation](#). A 1979 dramatization of *The Lord of the Rings* was broadcast in the United States and subsequently issued on tape and CD. In 1981, the BBC broadcast *The Lord of the Rings*, a new dramatization in 26 half-hour instalments. This dramatization of *The Lord of the Rings* has subsequently been made available on both tape and CD both by the BBC and other publishers. For this purpose it is generally edited into 13 one hour episodes.

Two film adaptations of the book as a whole have been made. The first was *J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings* (1978), by animator [Ralph Bakshi](#), the first part of what was originally intended to be a two-part adaptation of the story; it covers *The Fellowship of the Ring* and part of *The Two Towers*. When Bakshi's investors shied away of financing the second film that would complete the story, the remainder of the story was covered in an animated television special by [Rankin-Bass](#). Stylistically, the two segments are very different. The second and far more critically and commercially successful adaptation was [Peter Jackson's](#) live action *The Lord of the Rings film trilogy*, produced by [New Line Cinema](#) and released in three installments as *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002), and *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003). All three parts received nearly universal acclaim and were each nominated for and won multiple [Academy Awards](#), including consecutive [Best Picture](#) nominations. The final instalment of this trilogy was the second film to break the one-billion-dollar barrier and won a total of 11 [Oscars](#) (something only two other films in history, *Ben-Hur* and *Titanic*, have accomplished), including "[Best Picture](#)", "[Best Director](#)", "[Best Adapted Screenplay](#)" and "[Best Original Score](#)".

The Hunt for Gollum, a [fan film](#) based on elements of the appendices to *The Lord of the Rings*, was released on the internet in May 2009 and has been covered in major media.^[72]

In 1990, Recorded Books published an [audio version](#) of *The Lord of the Rings*,^[73] with British actor Rob Inglis – who had previously starred in one-man stage productions of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* – reading. A large-scale [musical theatre](#) adaptation, *The Lord of the Rings* was first staged in [Toronto, Ontario, Canada](#) in 2006 and opened in London in May 2007.

[\[edit\]](#) Legacy

Main article: [Works inspired by J. R. R. Tolkien](#)

[\[edit\]](#) Influences on the fantasy genre

The enormous popularity of Tolkien's epic saga greatly expanded the demand for [fantasy fiction](#). Largely thanks to *The Lord of the Rings*, the genre flowered throughout the 1960s, and enjoys popularity to the present day.

The work also had an influence upon such [science fiction](#) authors as [Frank Herbert](#) and [Arthur C. Clarke](#)^[74] and filmmakers such as [George Lucas](#).^[75]

[Dungeons & Dragons](#), which popularized the [role-playing game](#) (RPG) genre in the 1970s, features many races found in *The Lord of the Rings*, most notably [halflings](#) (another term for hobbits), elves, dwarves, [half-elves](#), [orcs](#), and dragons. However, [Gary Gygax](#), lead designer of the game, maintained that he was influenced very little by *The Lord of the Rings*, stating that he included these elements as a marketing move to draw on the popularity the work enjoyed at the time he was developing the game.^[76] Because D&D has influenced many popular [role-playing video games](#) through [Dragon Warrior](#),^{[77][78]} the influence of *The Lord of the Rings* extends to many of them as well, with titles such as [EverQuest](#), the [Warcraft](#) series, and the [Elder Scrolls](#) series of games^[79] as well as, quite naturally, [video games set in Middle-earth](#) itself.

[edit] Music

In 1965, songwriter [Donald Swann](#), who was best known for his collaboration with [Michael Flanders](#) as [Flanders & Swann](#), set six poems from *The Lord of the Rings* and one from [The Adventures of Tom Bombadil](#) ("Errantry") to music. When Swann met with Tolkien to play the songs for his approval, Tolkien suggested for "[Namárië](#)" (Galadriel's lament) a setting reminiscent of [plain chant](#), which Swann accepted.^[80] The songs were published in 1967 as [The Road Goes Ever On: A Song Cycle](#),^[81] and a recording of the songs performed by singer William Elvin with Swann on piano was issued that same year by [Caedmon Records](#) as *Poems and Songs of Middle Earth*.^[82]

In 1988, Dutch composer and trombonist [Johan de Meij](#) completed his [Symphony No. 1 "The Lord of the Rings"](#), which encompassed 5 movements, titled "Gandalf", "Lothlórien", "Gollum", "Journey in the Dark", and "Hobbits". In 1989 the symphony was awarded the [Sudler Composition Award](#), awarded biennially for best wind band composition. The Danish [Tolkien Ensemble](#) have released a number of albums that feature the complete poems and songs of *The Lord of the Rings* set to music, with some featuring recitation by [Christopher Lee](#).

Rock bands of the 1970s were musically and lyrically inspired by the fantasy embracing counter-culture of the time; British 70s rock band [Led Zeppelin](#) recorded several songs that contain explicit references to *The Lord of the Rings* ("[Ramble On](#)", "[The Battle of Evermore](#)", "[Over the Hills and Far Away](#)", and "[Misty Mountain Hop](#)"). In 1970, the Swedish musician [Bo Hansson](#) released an [instrumental concept album](#) based on the book entitled *Sagan om ringen* (translated as "The Saga of the Ring", which was the title of the Swedish translation of *The Lord of the Rings* at the time).^[83] The album was subsequently released internationally as [Music Inspired by Lord of the Rings](#) in 1972.^[83] The songs "Rivendell" and "The Necromancer" by the progressive rock band [Rush](#) were inspired by Tolkien. And [Styx](#) also paid homage to Tolkien on their "Pieces of Eight" album with the song "Lords of the Ring," while [Black Sabbath](#)'s song, "The Wizard", which appeared on their [debut album](#), was influenced by Tolkien's hero, Gandalf. The [heavy metal](#) band [Cirith Ungol](#) took their name from a fictional place in Middle-earth of the [same name](#). [Progressive rock](#) group [Camel](#) paid homage to the text in their lengthy composition "Nimrodel/The Procession/The White Rider", and Progressive rock band [Barclay James Harvest](#) was inspired by the character Galadriel to write a song by that name, and used "Bombadil", the name of another character, as a pseudonym under which their 1972 single "Breathless"/"When the City Sleeps" was released; there are other references scattered through the BJH oeuvre.

Later, from the 1980s to the present day, many [Heavy metal](#) acts have been influenced by Tolkien. [Blind Guardian](#) has written many songs relating to Middle-earth, including the full concept album *Nightfall in Middle Earth*. Almost all of [Summoning](#)'s songs and the entire discography of [Battlelore](#) are Tolkien-themed. [Gorgoroth](#) and [Amon Amarth](#) take their names from an area of [Mordor](#), and [Burzum](#) take their name from the [Black Speech](#) of Mordor. The Finnish metal band [Nightwish](#) and the Norwegian metal band [Tristania](#) have also incorporated many Tolkien references into their music. In 2001, the Hungarian metal band Cross Borns released a [metal opera](#) with the title *Kalandozás Középföldén* (Adventure in Middle Earth) based on the story of Lord of the Rings. Due to legal reasons, they couldn't use the original title.

[Enya](#) wrote an instrumental piece called "Lothlórien" in 1991, and composed two songs for the film *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*—"May It Be" (sung in English and [Quenya](#)) and "[Aníron](#)" (sung in [Sindarin](#)).

[edit] Impact on popular culture

The Lord of the Rings has had a profound and wide-ranging impact on [popular culture](#), beginning with its publication in the 1950s, but especially throughout the 1960s and 1970s, during which time young people embraced it as a [countercultural](#) saga.^[84] "[Frodo Lives!](#)" and "Gandalf for President" were two phrases popular among American [Tolkien fans](#) during this time.^[85]

In one scene of the 1993 film, *Six Degrees of Separation*, Paul ([Will Smith](#)) mocks *The Lord of the Rings* books in front of [Ian McKellen](#)'s character. Less than a decade after this film was made, Ian McKellen would play the role of Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy.

Parodies like the *Harvard Lampoon*'s *Bored of the Rings*, the *VeggieTales* episode "[Lord of the Beans](#)", the *South Park* episode "[The Return of the Fellowship of the Ring to the Two Towers](#)", the *Futurama* film "[Bender's Game](#)", *The Adventures of Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius* episode "Lights! Camera! Danger!", *The Big Bang Theory* episode "The Precious Fragmentation", and the *American Dad!* episode "The Return of the Bling" are testimony to the work's continual presence in popular culture.

In 1969 Tolkien sold the merchandising rights to *The Lord of The Rings* (and *The Hobbit*) to [United Artists](#) under an agreement stipulating a lump sum payment of £10,000^[86] plus a 7.5% royalty after costs^[87], payable to Allen & Unwin and the author.^[88] In 1976 (three years after the author's death) United Artists sold the rights to [Saul Zaentz](#) Company, who trade as [Tolkien Enterprises](#). Since then all "authorized" merchandise has been signed-off by Tolkien Enterprises, although the [intellectual property rights](#) of the specific likenesses of characters and other imagery from various adaptations is generally held by the adaptors.^[89] Outside any commercial exploitation from adaptations, from the late 1960s onwards there has been an increasing variety of original licensed merchandise, from posters and calendars created by illustrators such as [Pauline Baynes](#) and the [Brothers Hildebrandt](#), to figurines and miniatures to [computer](#), [video](#), [tabletop](#) and [role-playing](#) games. Recent examples include the [Spiel des Jahres](#) award winning (for *best use of literature in a game*) board game *The Lord of the Rings* by [Reiner Knizia](#) and the [Golden Joystick](#) award-winning [massively multiplayer online role-playing game](#), *The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar* by [Turbine, Inc.](#)

[[edit](#)] See also



- [Le Monde's 100 Books of the Century](#)
- [Norse mythology in popular culture](#)
- [1954 in literature](#)
- [1955 in literature](#)
- [Literature of the United Kingdom](#)

[[edit](#)] Notes

1. ^{[[^](#)]} This is made clear in the chapter The Council of Elrond, where Glorfindel states 'But in any case, to send the Ring to him would only postpone the day of evil. He is far away. We could not now take it back to him, unguessed, unmarked by any spy. And even if we could, soon or late the Lord of the Rings would learn of its hiding place and would bend all his power towards it.'^{[[3](#)]}
2. ^{[[^](#)]} Although Frodo referred to Bilbo as his "uncle", they were in fact first *and* second cousins, once removed either way (his paternal great-great-uncle's son's son and his maternal great-aunt's son).

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11. ^{[[^](#)]} [Tolkien, J. R. R.](#) (1954), *[The Fellowship of the Ring](#)*, *[The Lord of the Rings](#)*, Boston: [Houghton Mifflin](#) (published 1987), "The Shadow of the Past", [ISBN 0-395-08254-4](#) They are popularly thought to be cousins, but Tolkien only calls them "friends" in *The Lord of the Rings*. In a later letter (*The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, #214), he writes that they were "evidently relatives".

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