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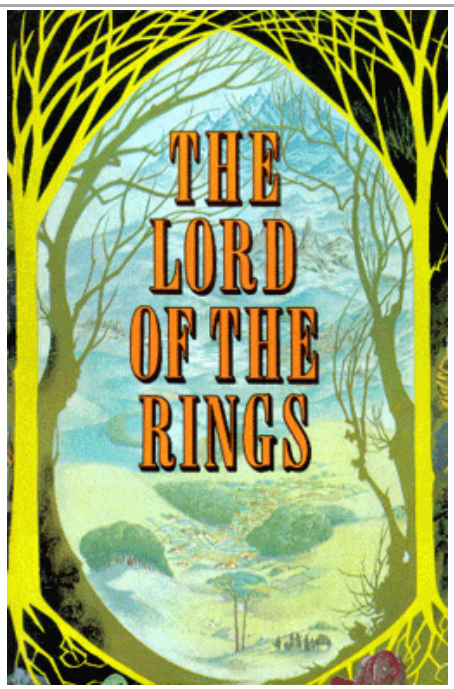
The Lord of the Rings

The Lord of the Rings is an epic[1] high-fantasy novel[a] by English author and scholar J. R. R. Tolkien. Set in Middle-earth, the story began as a sequel to Tolkien's 1937 children's book *The Hobbit*, but eventually developed into a much larger work. Written in stages between 1937 and 1949, *The Lord of the Rings* is one of the best-selling books ever written, with over 150 million copies sold.[2]

The title refers to the story's main antagonist,[b] the Dark Lord Sauron, who, in an earlier age, created the One Ring to rule the other Rings of Power given to Men, Dwarves, and Elves, in his campaign to conquer all of Middle-earth. From homely beginnings in the Shire, a hobbit land reminiscent of the English countryside, the story ranges across Middle-earth, following the quest to destroy the One Ring, seen mainly through the eyes of the hobbits Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin. Aiding Frodo are the Wizard Gandalf, the Man Aragorn, the Elf Legolas and the Dwarf Gimli, who unite in order to rally the Free Peoples of Middle-earth against Sauron's armies and give Frodo a chance to destroy the One Ring in the fire of Mount Doom.

Although often called a trilogy, the work was intended by Tolkien to be one volume of a two-volume set along with *The Silmarillion*.[3][T 3] For economic reasons, *The Lord of the Rings* was published over the course of a year from 29 July 1954 to 20 October 1955 in three volumes[3][4] titled *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*. The work is divided internally into six books, two per volume, with several appendices of background material. Some later editions print the entire work in a single volume, following the author's original intent.

The Lord of the Rings



The first single-volume edition (1968)

Author	J. R. R. Tolkien
Country	United Kingdom
Language	English
Genre	High fantasy Adventure
Set in	Middle-earth
Publisher	Allen & Unwin
Publication date	29 July 1954 (*The Fellowship of the Ring*) 11 November 1954 (*The Two Towers*) 20 October 1955 (*The Return of the King*)
Media type	Print (hardback & paperback)
OCLC	1487587 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1487587)
Preceded by	*The Hobbit*
Followed by	*The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*

Tolkien's work, after an initially mixed reception by the literary establishment, has been the subject of extensive analysis of its themes and origins. Influences on this earlier work, and on the story of *The Lord of the Rings*, include philology, mythology, Christianity, earlier fantasy works, and his own experiences in the First World War.

The Lord of the Rings is considered one of the greatest fantasy books ever written and it has helped to create and shape the modern fantasy genre. Since release, it has been reprinted many times and translated into at least 38 languages.[c] Its enduring popularity has led to numerous references in popular culture, the founding of many societies by fans of Tolkien's works,[5] and the publication of many books about Tolkien and his works. It has inspired many derivative works, including paintings, music, films, television, video games, and board games.

Award-winning adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* have been made for radio, theatre, and film. It was named Britain's best-loved novel of all time in the BBC's 2003 poll The Big Read.

Plot

The Fellowship of the Ring

Prologue

The prologue explains that the work is "largely concerned with hobbits", telling of their origins in a migration from the east, their habits such as smoking "pipe-weed", and how their homeland the Shire is organised. It explains how the narrative follows on from *The Hobbit*, in which the hobbit Bilbo Baggins finds the One Ring, which had been in the possession of Gollum.

Book I: The Ring Sets Out

Gandalf proves that Frodo's Ring is the One Ring by throwing it into Frodo's fireplace, revealing the hidden text of the Rhyme of the Rings.

Bilbo celebrates his eleventy-first (111th) birthday and leaves the Shire suddenly, passing the Ring to Frodo Baggins, his cousin[d] and heir. Neither hobbit is aware of the Ring's origin, but the wizard Gandalf suspects it is a Ring of Power. Seventeen years later, in "The Shadow of the Past", Gandalf tells Frodo that he has confirmed that the Ring is the one lost by the Dark Lord Sauron long ago and counsels him to take it away from the Shire. Gandalf leaves, promising to return by Frodo's birthday and accompany him on his journey, but fails to do so.

Frodo sets out on foot, offering a cover story of moving to Crickhollow, accompanied by his gardener Sam Gamgee and his cousin Pippin Took. They are pursued by mysterious Black Riders, but meet a passing group of Elves led by Gildor Inglorion, whose chants to Elbereth ward off the Riders. The hobbits spend the night with them, then take an evasive short cut the next day, and arrive at the farm of Farmer Maggot, who takes them to Bucklebury Ferry, where they meet their friend Merry Brandybuck. When they reach the house at Crickhollow, Merry and Pippin reveal they know about the Ring and insist on travelling with Frodo and Sam.

They decide to try to shake off the Black Riders by cutting through the Old Forest. Merry and Pippin are trapped by Old Man Willow, an ancient tree who controls much of the forest, but are rescued by Tom Bombadil. Leaving the refuge of Tom's house, they get lost in a fog and are caught by a barrow-wight in a barrow on the downs, but Frodo, awakening from the barrow-wight's spell, calls Tom Bombadil, who frees them, and equips them with ancient swords from the barrow-wight's hoard.

The hobbits reach the village of Bree, where they encounter a Ranger named Strider. The innkeeper gives Frodo a letter from Gandalf written three months before which identifies Strider as a friend. Knowing the riders will attempt to seize the party, Strider guides the hobbits through the wilderness toward the Elven sanctuary of Rivendell. On the way, the group stops at the hill Weathertop. While at Weathertop, they are again attacked by five of the nine Black Riders. During the struggle, their leader wounds Frodo with a cursed blade. After fighting them off, Strider treats Frodo with the herb athelas, and is joined by the Elf Glorfindel who has been searching for the party. Glorfindel rides with Frodo, now deathly ill, toward Rivendell. The Black Riders nearly capture Frodo at the Ford of Bruinen, but upon attempting to cross the ford, flood waters summoned by Elrond rise up and overwhelm them.

Book II: The Ring Goes South

Frodo recovers in Rivendell under Elrond's care. Gandalf informs Frodo that the Black Riders are the Nazgûl, Men from ancient times enslaved by lesser Rings of Power to serve Sauron. The Council of Elrond discusses the history of Sauron and the Ring. Strider is revealed to be Aragorn, the heir of Isildur. Isildur had cut the One Ring from Sauron's hand in the battle ending the Second Age, but refused to destroy it, claiming it for himself. The Ring had been lost when Isildur was killed, finally ending up in Bilbo's possession after his meeting with Gollum, described in *The Hobbit*. Gandalf reports that the chief wizard, Saruman, has betrayed them and is now working to become a power in his own right. Gandalf was captured by him, but escaped, explaining why he had failed to return to meet Frodo as he had promised.

The Council decides that the Ring must be destroyed, but that can be done only by sending it to the fire of Mount Doom in Mordor where it was forged. Frodo takes this task upon himself. Elrond, with the advice of Gandalf, chooses companions for him. The Fellowship of the Ring consists of nine walkers who set out on the quest to destroy the One Ring, in opposition to the nine Black Riders: Frodo Baggins, Sam Gamgee, Merry Brandybuck and Pippin Took; Gandalf; the Elf Legolas; the Dwarf Gimli; and the Men Aragorn and Boromir, son of the Steward of Gondor. The Fellowship thus represents the Free Peoples of the West – Elves, Dwarves, Men, and Hobbits, assisted by a Wizard.

After a failed attempt to cross the Misty Mountains over the Redhorn Pass, the Fellowship take the perilous path through the Mines of Moria. They learn that Balin, one of the Dwarves who accompanied Bilbo in *The Hobbit*, and his colony of Dwarves were killed by Orcs. After surviving an attack, they are pursued by Orcs and a Balrog, an ancient fire demon from a prior Age. Gandalf confronts the Balrog, and both of them fall into the abyss of Moria. The others escape and find refuge in the timeless Elven forest of Lothlórien, where they are counselled by the Lady Galadriel. Before they leave, Galadriel tests their loyalty, and gives them individual, magical gifts to help them on their quest. She allows Frodo and Sam to look into her fountain, the Mirror of Galadriel, to see visions of the past, the present, and perhaps the future, and she refuses to take the Ring Frodo offers her, knowing that it would master her.

Galadriel's husband Celeborn gives the Fellowship boats, elven cloaks, and waybread (Lembas), and they travel down the River Anduin to the hill of Amon Hen. There, Boromir tries to take the Ring from Frodo, but immediately regrets it after Frodo puts on the Ring and disappears. Frodo chooses to go

alone to Mordor, but Sam, guessing what he intends, intercepts him as he tries to take a boat across the river, and goes with him.

The Two Towers

Book III: The Treason of Isengard

A party of large Orcs, Uruk-hai, sent by Saruman, and other Orcs sent by Sauron and led by Grishnákh, attack the Fellowship. Boromir tries to protect Merry and Pippin from the Orcs, but they kill him and capture the two hobbits. Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas decide to pursue the Orcs taking Merry and Pippin to Saruman. In the kingdom of Rohan, the Orcs are killed by Riders of Rohan, led by Éomer. 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. There they unexpectedly meet Gandalf.

Gandalf explains that he killed the Balrog. He was also killed in the fight, but was sent back to Middle-earth to complete his mission. He is clothed in white and is now Gandalf the White, for he has taken Saruman's place as the chief of the wizards. Gandalf assures his friends that Merry and Pippin are safe. Together they ride to Edoras, capital of Rohan. Gandalf frees Théoden, King of Rohan, from the influence of Saruman's spy Gríma Wormtongue. Théoden musters his fighting strength and rides with his men to the ancient fortress of Helm's Deep, while Gandalf departs to seek help from Treebeard.

Meanwhile, the Ents, roused by Merry and Pippin from their peaceful ways, attack and destroy Isengard, Saruman's stronghold, and flood it, trapping the wizard in the tower of Orthanc. Gandalf convinces Treebeard to send an army of Huorns to Théoden's aid. He brings an army of Rohirrim to Helm's Deep, and they defeat the Orcs, who flee into the forest of Huorns, never to be seen again. Gandalf, Théoden, Legolas, and Gimli ride to Isengard, and are surprised to find Merry and Pippin relaxing amidst the ruins. Gandalf offers Saruman a chance to turn away from evil. When Saruman refuses to listen, Gandalf strips him of his rank and most of his powers. After Saruman leaves, Wormtongue throws down a hard round object to try to kill Gandalf. Pippin picks it up; Gandalf swiftly takes it, but Pippin steals it in the night. It is revealed to be a *palantír*, a seeing-stone that Saruman used to speak with Sauron, and that Sauron used to ensnare him. Sauron sees Pippin, but misunderstands the circumstances. Gandalf immediately rides for Minas Tirith, chief city of Gondor, taking Pippin with him.

Book IV: The Ring Goes East

Frodo and Sam, heading for Mordor, struggle through the barren hills and cliffs of the Emyn Muil. They become aware they are being watched and tracked; on a moonlit night they capture Gollum, who has followed them from Moria. Frodo makes Gollum swear to serve him, as Ringbearer, and asks him to guide them to Mordor. Gollum leads them across the Dead Marshes. Sam overhears Gollum debating with his alter ego, Sméagol, whether to break his promise and steal the Ring.

They find that the Black Gate of Mordor is too well guarded, so instead they travel south through the land of Ithilien to a secret pass that Gollum knows. On the way, they are captured by rangers led by Faramir, Boromir's brother, and brought to the secret fastness of Henneth Annûn. Faramir resists the temptation to seize the Ring and, disobeying standing orders to arrest strangers found in Ithilien, releases them.

Gollum – who is torn between his loyalty to Frodo and his desire for the Ring – guides the hobbits to the pass, but leads them into the lair of the great spider Shelob in the tunnels of Cirith Ungol. Frodo holds up the gift given to him in Lothlórien: the Phial of Galadriel, which holds the light of Eärendil's star. The light drives Shelob back. Frodo cuts through a giant web using his sword Sting. Shelob attacks again, and Frodo falls to her venom. Sam picks up Sting and the Phial. He seriously wounds and drives off the monster. Believing Frodo to be dead, Sam takes the Ring to continue the quest alone. Orcs find Frodo; Sam overhears them and learns that Frodo is still alive, but is separated from him.

The Return of the King

Book V: The War of the Ring

Sauron sends a great army against Gondor. Gandalf arrives at Minas Tirith to warn Denethor of the attack, while Théoden musters the Rohirrim to ride to Gondor's aid. Minas Tirith is besieged; the Lord of the Nazgûl uses a spell-wound battering ram to destroy the city's gates. Denethor, deceived by Sauron, falls into despair. He burns himself alive on a pyre; Pippin and Gandalf rescue his son Faramir from the same fate.

Aragorn, accompanied by Legolas, Gimli, and the Rangers of the North, takes the Paths of the Dead to recruit the Dead Men of Dunharrow, oathbreakers who are bound by an ancient curse which denies them rest until they fulfil their oath to fight for the King of Gondor. Aragorn unleashes the Army of the Dead on the Corsairs of Umbar invading southern Gondor. With that threat eliminated, Aragorn uses the Corsairs' ships to transport the men of southern Gondor up the Anduin, reaching Minas Tirith just in time to turn the tide of battle. Théoden's niece Éowyn, who joined the army in disguise, kills the Lord of the Nazgûl with help from Merry; both are wounded. Together, Gondor and Rohan defeat Sauron's army in the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, though at great cost; Théoden is among the dead.

Aragorn enters Minas Tirith and heals Faramir, Éowyn, and Merry. He leads an army of men from Gondor and Rohan, marching through Ithilien to the Black Gate to distract Sauron from his true danger. At the Battle of the Morannon, his army is vastly outnumbered.

Book VI: The End of the Third Age

Meanwhile, Sam rescues Frodo from the tower of Cirith Ungol. They set out across Mordor. When they reach the edge of the Cracks of Doom, Frodo cannot resist the Ring any longer. He claims it for himself and puts it on. Gollum suddenly reappears. He struggles with Frodo and bites off Frodo's finger with the Ring still on it. Celebrating wildly, Gollum loses his footing and falls into the Fire, taking the Ring with him. When the Ring is destroyed, Sauron loses his power forever. All he created collapses, the Nazgûl perish, and his armies are thrown into such disarray that Aragorn's forces emerge victorious.

Aragorn is crowned King of Arnor and Gondor, and weds Arwen, daughter of Elrond. Théoden is buried and Éomer is crowned King of Rohan. His sister Éowyn is engaged to marry Faramir, now Steward of Gondor and Prince of Ithilien. Galadriel, Celeborn, and Gandalf meet and say farewell to Treebeard, and to Aragorn.

The four hobbits make their way back to the Shire, only to find that it has been taken over by men directed by "Sharkey" (whom they later discover to be Saruman). The hobbits, led by Merry, raise a rebellion and scour the Shire of Sharkey's evil. Gríma Wormtongue turns on Saruman and kills him in front of Bag End, Frodo's home. He is killed in turn by hobbit archers. Merry and Pippin are celebrated as heroes. Sam marries Rosie Cotton and uses his gifts from Galadriel to help heal the Shire. But Frodo is still wounded in body and spirit, having borne the Ring for so long. A few years later, in the company of Bilbo and Gandalf, Frodo sails from the Grey Havens west over the Sea to the Undying Lands to find peace.

Appendices

The appendices outline more details of the history, cultures, genealogies, and languages that Tolkien imagined for the peoples of Middle-earth. They provide background details for the narrative, with much detail for Tolkien fans who want to know more about the stories.

Appendix A: "Annals of the Kings and Rulers"
: Provides extensive background to the larger world of Middle-earth, with brief overviews of the events of the first two Ages of the world, and then more detailed histories of the nations of Men in Gondor and Rohan, as well as a history of the royal Dwarvish line of Durin during the Third Age.

  The embedded "Tale of Aragorn and Arwen" tells how it happened that an immortal elf came to marry a man, as told in the main story, which Arwen's ancestor Lúthien had done in the First Age, giving up her immortality.

Appendix B: "The Tale of Years" (Chronology of the Westlands)
: It is a timeline of events throughout the series, and ancient events affecting the narrative, and in lesser detail, it gives the stories' context in the fictional chronology of the larger mythology.

  It also tells that Sam gives his daughter Elanor the fictional *Red Book of Westmarch* – which contains the autobiographical stories of Bilbo's adventures at the opening of the war, and Frodo's role in the full-on War of the Ring, and serves as Tolkien's source for *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* (with Tolkien representing himself as a translator, rather than an epic novelist). It says that there was "a tradition" that after handing over the book, Sam crossed west over the sea himself, the last of the ring-bearers; and that some years later, after the deaths of Aragorn and Arwen, Legolas and Gimli also sailed together "over Sea".

Appendix C: "Family Trees" (Hobbits)
: Gives hobbit genealogies – not only for Bilbo and Frodo's Baggins family, but also their relations the Tooks and Brandybucks, which connect them to Pippin and Merry.

Appendix D: "Calendars"
: Describes some of the calendars used by the characters in the story, and explains that the Roman month names in the text are "translations" of the names in the hobbits' calendar. (Tolkien was a linguist, and provided Germanic-sounding names for the hobbit calendar by extrapolating names of German and Old English months forward to what he thought they might have become if all were still used in modern English, as *Yule* and *Easter* are.)

Appendix E: "Writing and Spelling"
: Describes dwarves' runes and the elvish runes use by the other peoples of Middle-earth; the names of the runes and letters incidentally give a bit of information about dwarvish and elvish languages.

Appendix F: "Languages and Peoples of the Third Age" and "On Translation"
: Presented as two sections. In addition to outlines of the various languages in current use during the narrative, and mentioned or seen in the story, it discusses hobbits' names at length. It sorts

out names which Tolkien affected to have translated into English, and names which said he had left in original form (since they had no meaning in hobbits' everyday language).

Frame story

Tolkien presents *The Lord of the Rings* within a fictional frame story where he is not the original author, but merely the translator of part of an ancient document, the *Red Book of Westmarch*.[6] That book is modelled on the real *Red Book of Hergest*, which similarly presents an older mythology. Various details of the frame story appear in the Prologue, its "Note on Shire Records", and in the Appendices, notably Appendix F. In this frame story, the *Red Book* is the purported source of Tolkien's other works relating to Middle-earth: *The Hobbit*, *The Silmarillion*, and *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*.[7]

Concept and creation

Background

Although a major work in itself, *The Lord of the Rings* was only the last movement of a much older set of narratives Tolkien had worked on since 1917 encompassing *The Silmarillion*,[8] in a process he described as *mythopoeia*.[e]

The Lord of the Rings started as a sequel to Tolkien's work *The Hobbit*, published in 1937.[10] 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 *Roverandom* on hold, and accepting *Farmer Giles of Ham*, Allen & Unwin continued to ask for more stories about hobbits.[11]

Writing

Persuaded by his publishers, he started "a new Hobbit" in December 1937.[10] 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 come until the spring of 1938.[10] 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 thought that would be a better focus for the new work.[10] As the story progressed, he brought in elements from *The Silmarillion* mythology.[12]

Writing was slow, because Tolkien had a full-time academic position, marked exams to bring in a little extra income, and wrote many drafts.[10][T 4] Tolkien abandoned *The Lord of the Rings* during most of 1943 and only restarted it in April 1944,[10] 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 major effort in 1946, and showed the manuscript to his publishers in 1947.[10] The story

was effectively finished the next year, but Tolkien did not complete the revision of earlier parts of the work until 1949.[10] The original manuscripts, which total 9,250 pages, now reside in the J. R. R. Tolkien Collection at Marquette University.[13]

Poetry

Unusually for 20th century novels, the prose narrative is supplemented throughout by over 60 pieces of poetry. These include verse and songs of many genres: for wandering, marching to war, drinking, and having a bath; narrating ancient myths, riddles, prophecies, and magical incantations; and of praise and lament (elegy).[14] Some, such as riddles, charms, elegies, and narrating heroic actions are found in Old English poetry.[14] Scholars have stated that the poetry is essential for the fiction to work aesthetically and thematically, as it adds information not given in the prose, and it brings out characters and their backgrounds.[15][16] The poetry has been judged to be of high technical skill, reflected in Tolkien's prose; for instance, he wrote much of Tom Bombadil's speech in metre.[17]

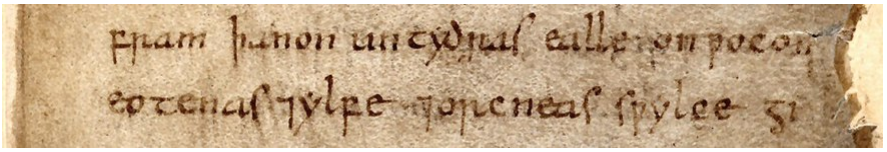
Illustrations

Tolkien worked on the text using his maps of Middle-earth as a guide, to ensure the elements of the story fitted together in time and space.[T 5] He prepared a variety of types of illustration – maps, calligraphy, drawings, cover designs, even a facsimile painting of the Book of Mazarbul – but only the maps, the inscription on the Ring, and a drawing of the Doors of Durin were included in the first edition.[18][T 6]

Tolkien's calligraphy of the Rhyme of the Rings was one of the few illustrations in the first edition. It is written in the Black Speech of Mordor using the Tengwar script.

The hardback editions sometimes had cover illustrations by Tolkien,[f] sometimes by other artists. According to *The New York Times*, Barbara Remington's cover designs for Ballantine's paperback editions "achieved mass-cult status in the 1960s, particularly on college campuses" across America.[19]

Influences



Beowulf's *eotenas [ond] ylfe [ond] orcneas*, "ogres [and] elves [and] devil-corpses" helped to inspire Tolkien to create the Orcs and Elves of Middle-earth.[20]

Tolkien drew on a wide array of influences including language,[T 7] Christianity,[T 8] mythology and Germanic heroic legend including the Norse *Völsunga saga*,[21] archaeology, especially at the Temple of Nodens,[22] ancient and modern literature, like Finnish 19th-century epic poetry *The Kalevala* by Elias Lönnrot,[23] and personal experience. He was inspired primarily by his profession, philology;[T 9] his work centred on the study of Old English literature, especially *Beowulf*, and he acknowledged its importance to his writings.[20] He was a gifted linguist, influenced by Celtic,[24][21] Finnish,[25] Slavic,[26] and Greek language and mythology.[27] Commentators have attempted to identify literary and topological antecedents for characters, places

and events in Tolkien's writings; he acknowledged that he had enjoyed adventure stories by authors such as John Buchan and Rider Haggard.[28][29][30] The Arts and Crafts polymath William Morris was a major influence,[T 10] and Tolkien undoubtedly made use of some real place-names, such as Bag End, the name of his aunt's home.[31] Tolkien stated, too, that he had been influenced by his childhood experiences of the English countryside of Worcestershire near Sarehole Mill, and its urbanisation by the growth of Birmingham,[T 11] and his personal experience of fighting in the trenches of the First World War.[32] Moreover, the militarization and industrialization inspired the character of Sauron and his forces. The Orcs represented the worst of it as workers that have been tortured and brutalized by the war and industry.[33]

Themes

Scholars and critics have identified many themes in the book with its complex interlaced narrative, including a reversed quest,[34][35] the struggle of good and evil,[36] death and immortality,[37] fate and free will,[38] the addictive danger of power,[39] and various aspects of Christianity such as the presence of three Christ figures, for prophet, priest, and king, as well as elements like hope and redemptive suffering.[40][41][42][43] There is a common theme throughout the work of language, its sound, and its relationship to peoples and places, along with hints of providence in descriptions of weather and landscape.[44] Out of these, Tolkien stated that the central theme is death and immortality.[T 12] To those who supposed that the book was an allegory of events in the 20th century, Tolkien replied in the foreword to the Second Edition that it was not, saying he preferred "history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers."

Some commentators have criticized the book for being a story about men for boys, with no significant women; or about a purely rural world with no bearing on modern life in cities; of containing no sign of religion; or of racism. Other commentators responded by noting that there are three powerful women in the book, Galadriel, Éowyn, and Arwen; that life, even in rural Hobbiton, is not idealised; that Christianity is a pervasive theme; and that Tolkien was sharply anti-racist both in peacetime and during the Second World War, while Middle-earth is evidently polycultural.[45][46][47]

Publication history

A dispute with his publisher, George Allen & Unwin, led Tolkien to offer the work to William Collins in 1950. Tolkien intended *The Silmarillion* (itself largely unrevised at this point) to be published along with *The Lord of the Rings,* but Allen & Unwin were unwilling to do this. After Milton Waldman, his contact at Collins, expressed the belief that *The Lord of the Rings* itself "urgently wanted cutting", Tolkien eventually demanded that they publish the book in 1952.[48] Collins did not; and so Tolkien wrote to Allen and Unwin, saying, "I would gladly consider the publication of any part of the stuff", fearing his work would never see the light of day.[10]

For publication, the work was divided into three volumes to minimize any potential financial loss due to the high cost of type-setting and modest anticipated sales: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Books I and II), *The Two Towers* (Books III and IV), and *The Return of the King* (Books V and VI plus six appendices).[49] Delays in producing appendices, maps and especially an index led to the volumes being published later than originally hoped – on 29 July 1954, on 11 November 1954 and on 20 October 1955 respectively in the United Kingdom.[50] In the United States, Houghton Mifflin published *The Fellowship of the Ring* on 21 October 1954, *The Two Towers* on 21 April 1955, and *The Return of the King* on 5 January 1956.[51]

The Return of the King was especially delayed as Tolkien revised the ending and prepared appendices (some of which had to be left out because of space constraints). Tolkien did not like the title *The Return of the King*, believing it gave away too much of the storyline, but deferred to his publisher's preference.[52] Tolkien wrote that the title *The Two Towers* "can be left ambiguous",[T 13] but considered naming the two as Orthanc and Barad-dûr, Minas Tirith and Barad-dûr, or Orthanc and the Tower of Cirith Ungol.[T 14] However, a month later he wrote a note published at the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring* and later drew a cover illustration, both of which identified the pair as Minas Morgul and Orthanc.[53][54]

Tolkien was initially opposed to titles being given to each two-book volume, preferring instead the use of book titles: e.g. *The Lord of the Rings*: Vol. 1, *The Ring Sets Out* and *The Ring Goes South*; Vol. 2, *The Treason of Isengard* and *The Ring Goes East*; Vol. 3, *The War of the Ring* and *The End of the Third Age*. However, these individual book titles were dropped, and after pressure from his publishers, Tolkien suggested the volume titles: Vol. 1, *The Shadow Grows*; Vol. 2, *The Ring in the Shadow*; Vol. 3, *The War of the Ring* or *The Return of the King*.[55][56]

Because the three-volume binding was so widely distributed, the work is often referred to as the *Lord of the Rings* "trilogy". In a letter to the poet W. H. Auden, who famously reviewed the final volume in 1956,[57] Tolkien himself made use of the term "trilogy" for the work[T 15] though he did at other times consider this incorrect, as it was written and conceived as a single book.[T 16] It is often called a novel; however, Tolkien objected to this term as he viewed it as a heroic romance.[T 17]

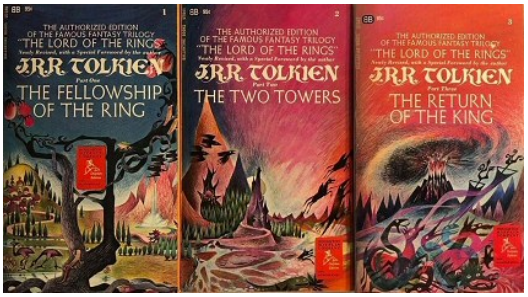
The books were published under a profit-sharing arrangement, whereby Tolkien would not receive an advance or royalties until the books had broken even, after which he would take a large share of the profits.[58] It has ultimately become one of the best-selling novels ever written, with 50 million copies sold by 2003[59] and over 150 million copies sold by 2007.[2] The work was published in the UK by Allen & Unwin until 1990, when the publisher and its assets were acquired by HarperCollins.[60][61]

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 US hardcover publisher, had neglected to copyright the work in the United States.[62][63] Then, in 1965, Ace Books 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.[64] Grass-roots pressure from these fans became so great that Ace Books withdrew their edition and made a nominal payment to Tolkien.[65][T 18]

Authorized editions followed from Ballantine Books and Houghton Mifflin to tremendous commercial success. 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.[65] The first Ballantine paperback edition was printed in October that year, selling a quarter of a million copies within ten months. On 4 September 1966, the novel debuted on *The New York Times*'s Paperback Bestsellers list as number three, and was number one by 4 December, a position it held for eight weeks.[68] 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.[69]

In 2004, for the 50th Anniversary Edition, Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, under supervision from Christopher Tolkien, studied and revised the text to eliminate as many errors and inconsistencies as possible, some of which had been introduced by well-meaning compositors of the first printing in 1954, and never been corrected.[70] The 2005 edition of the book contained further corrections noticed by the editors and submitted by readers. Yet more corrections were made in the 60th Anniversary Edition in 2014.[71] Several editions, including the 50th Anniversary Edition, print the whole work in one volume, with the result that pagination varies widely over the various editions.[T 19]



Barbara Remington's cover illustrations for the Ballantine paperback version "achieved mass-cult status" on American college campuses in the 1960s.[19] They were parodied by Michael K. Frith's cover design for the 1969 *Bored of the Rings*.[66][67]

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*.[72]

Translations

The work has been translated, with varying degrees of success, into at least 38,[c] and reportedly at least 70, languages.[73] 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,[T 20] 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*, using the English language to represent 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.[74][75]

Reception

1950s

Early reviews of the work were mixed. The initial review in the *Sunday Telegraph* described it as "among the greatest works of imaginative fiction of the twentieth century".[76] The *Sunday Times* echoed this sentiment, stating 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."[76] The *New York Herald Tribune* appeared to predict the books' popularity, writing in its review that they were "destined to outlast our time".[77] W. H. Auden, a former pupil of Tolkien's and an admirer of his 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*.[78] Kenneth F. Slater wrote in Nebula Science Fiction, April 1955, "... if you don't read it, you have missed one of the finest books of its type ever to appear".[79][80] On the other hand, in 1955, the Scottish poet Edwin Muir attacked *The Return of the*

King, writing that "All the characters are boys masquerading as adult heroes ... and will never come to puberty ... Hardly one of them knows anything about women", causing Tolkien to complain angrily to his publisher.[81] In 1956, the literary critic Edmund Wilson wrote a review entitled "Oo, Those Awful Orcs!", calling Tolkien's work "juvenile trash", and saying "Dr. Tolkien has little skill at narrative and no instinct for literary form."[82]

Within Tolkien's literary group, The Inklings, the work had a mixed reception. Hugo Dyson complained loudly at its readings,[83][84] whereas 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."[8] Lewis observed that the writing is rich, in that some of the 'good' characters have darker sides, and likewise some of the villains have "good impulses".[85] Despite the mixed reviews and the lack of a paperback until the 1960s, *The Lord of the Rings* initially sold well in hardback.[8]

Later

Judith Shulevitz, writing in *The New York Times*, 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".[86] The critic Richard Jenkyns, writing in *The New Republic*, criticized the work for a lack of psychological depth. Both the characters and the work itself were, according to Jenkyns, "anemic, and lacking in fibre".[87] The science fiction author David Brin interprets the work as holding unquestioning devotion to a traditional hierarchical social structure.[88] In his essay "Epic Pooh", 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.[89] Tom Shippey, like Tolkien an English philologist, notes the wide gulf between Tolkien's supporters, both popular and academic, and his literary detractors, and attempts to explain in detail both why the literary establishment disliked *The Lord of the Rings*, and the work's subtlety, themes, and merits, including the impression of depth that it conveys.[12] The scholar of humanities Brian Rosebury analysed Tolkien's prose style in detail, showing that it was generally quite plain, varying to suit the voices of the different characters, and rising to a heroic register for special moments.[90]

Awards

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.[91] 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[92] and Australia[93] chose *The Lord of the Rings* as 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 millennium".[94] In 2019, the BBC News listed *The Lord of the Rings* on its list of the 100 most influential novels.[95]

Adaptations

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

Radio

The book has been adapted for radio four times. In 1955 and 1956, the BBC broadcast *The Lord of the Rings*, a 13-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.[96][97]

Film and television

A variety of filmmakers considered adapting Tolkien's book, among them Stanley Kubrick, who thought it unfilmable,[98][99] Michelangelo Antonioni,[100] Jim Henson,[101] Heinz Edelmann,[102] and John Boorman.[103] A Swedish live action television film, *Sagan om ringen*, was broadcast in 1971.[104] In 1978, Ralph Bakshi made an animated film version covering *The Fellowship of the Ring* and part of *The Two Towers*, to mixed reviews.[105] In 1980, Rankin/Bass released an animated TV special based on the closing chapters of *The Return of the King*, gaining mixed reviews.[106][107] In Finland, a live action television miniseries, *Hobitit*, was broadcast in 1993 based on *The Lord of the Rings*, with a flashback to Bilbo's encounter with Gollum in *The Hobbit*.[108][109]

A far more successful adaptation was Peter Jackson's live action *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy, produced by New Line Cinema and released in three instalments 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 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 and Best Adapted Screenplay.[110][111] Commentators including Tolkien scholars, literary critics and film critics are divided on how faithfully Jackson adapted Tolkien's work, or whether a film version is inevitably different, and if so the reasons for any changes, and the effectiveness of the result.[112]

The Hunt for Gollum, a 2009 film by Chris Bouchard,[113][114] and the 2009 *Born of Hope*, written by Paula DiSante and directed by Kate Madison, are fan films based on details in the appendices of *The Lord of the Rings*.[115]

From September 2022, Amazon is presenting a multi-season television series of stories, *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*. It is set at the beginning of the Second Age, long before the time of *The Lord of the Rings*, based on materials in the novel's appendices.[116][117][118]

In early 2023, Warner Bros Discovery announced that multiple new movies set in Middle-earth are in development, and will be produced along with New Line Cinema and Freemode.[119]

Audiobooks

In 1990, Recorded Books published an audio version of *The Lord of the Rings*,[120] read by the British actor Rob Inglis. 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 June 2007; it was a commercial

failure.[121]

In 2013, the artist Phil Dragash recorded the whole of the book, using the score from Peter Jackson's movies.[122][123][124]

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Andy Serkis read the entire book of *The Hobbit* online to raise money for charity.[125] He then recorded the work again as an audiobook.[126][127] The cover art was done by Alan Lee. In 2021, Serkis recorded *The Lord of the Rings* novels.[128]

Legacy

Influence on fantasy

The enormous popularity of Tolkien's work expanded the demand for fantasy. Largely thanks to *The Lord of the Rings,* the genre flowered throughout the 1960s and enjoys popularity to the present day.[129] The opus has spawned many imitations, such as *The Sword of Shannara*, which Lin Carter called "the single most cold-blooded, complete rip-off of another book that I have ever read,"[130] as well as alternate interpretations of the story, such as *The Last Ringbearer*. *The Legend of Zelda*, which popularized the action-adventure game genre in the 1980s, was inspired by *The Lord of the Rings* among other fantasy books.[131][132] *Dungeons & Dragons*, which popularized the role-playing game genre in the 1970s, features several races from *The Lord of the Rings,* including halflings (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.[133] Because Dungeons & Dragons has gone on to influence many popular games, especially role-playing video games, the influence of *The Lord of the Rings* extends to many of them, with titles such as *Dragon Quest*,[134][135] *EverQuest*, the *Warcraft* series, and *The Elder Scrolls* series of games[136] as well as video games set in Middle-earth itself.

Music

In 1965, the songwriter Donald Swann, 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.[137] The songs were published in 1967 as *The Road Goes Ever On: A Song Cycle*,[138] 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*.[139]

Rock bands of the 1970s were musically and lyrically inspired by the fantasy-embracing counter-culture of the time. The British rock band Led Zeppelin recorded several songs that contain explicit references to *The Lord of the Rings*, such as mentioning Gollum and Mordor in "Ramble On", the Misty Mountains in "Misty Mountain Hop", and Ringwraiths in "The Battle of Evermore". In 1970, the Swedish musician Bo Hansson released an instrumental concept album entitled *Sagan om ringen* ("The Saga of the Ring", the title of the Swedish translation at the time).[140] The album was subsequently released internationally as *Music Inspired by Lord of the Rings* in 1972.[140] From the 1980s onwards, many heavy metal acts have been influenced by Tolkien.[141]

In 1988, the Dutch composer and trombonist Johan de Meij completed his *Symphony No. 1 "The Lord of the Rings"*. It had 5 movements, titled "Gandalf", "Lothlórien", "Gollum", "Journey in the Dark", and "Hobbits".[142]

The 1991 album *Shepherd Moons* by the Irish musician Enya contains an instrumental titled "Lothlórien", in reference to the home of the wood-elves.[143]

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 during the 1960s and 1970s, when young people embraced it as a countercultural saga.[144] "Frodo Lives!" and "Gandalf for President" were two phrases popular amongst United States Tolkien fans during this time.[145] Its impact is such that the words "Tolkienian" and "Tolkienesque" have entered the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and many of his fantasy terms, formerly little-known in English, such as "Orc" and "Warg", have become widespread in that domain.[146] Among its effects are numerous parodies, especially *Harvard Lampoon*'s *Bored of the Rings*, which has had the distinction of remaining continuously in print from its publication in 1969, and of being translated into at least 11 languages.[147]

"Welcome to Hobbiton" sign in Matamata, New Zealand, where Peter Jackson's film version was shot

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[148] plus a 7.5% royalty after costs,[149] payable to Allen & Unwin and the author.[150] In 1976, three years after the author's death, United Artists sold the rights to Saul Zaentz Company, who now trade as Tolkien Enterprises. Since then all "authorised" 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.[151]

Outside commercial exploitation from adaptations, from the late 1960s onwards there has been an increasing variety of original licensed merchandise, with posters and calendars created by illustrators such as Barbara Remington.[152]

The work was named Britain's best novel of all time in the BBC's The Big Read.[153] In 2015, the BBC ranked *The Lord of the Rings* 26th on its list of the 100 greatest British novels.[154] It was included in *Le Monde*'s list of "100 Books of the Century".[155]

Notes

a. J. R. R. Tolkien did not like it when the word "novel" was used to describe his works, but the term is commonly applied. He preferred the phrase "heroic romance".[T 1]
b. Tolkien has the wizard Gandalf say to the hobbit Frodo "the Black Riders are the Ringwraiths, the Nine Servants of the Lord of the Rings."[T 2]
c. At least 38 languages are listed at the FAQ (https://web.archive.org/web/20070530043707/http://www.tolkien.co.uk/faq3.aspx). This number is a conservative estimate; some 56 translations are

listed at translations of *The Lord of the Rings*, and 57 languages are listed at Elrond's Library (http://www.elrondslibrary.fr/).

d. Although Frodo refers to Bilbo as his "uncle", the character is introduced in "A Long-expected Party" as one of Bilbo's younger cousins. The two 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).

e. Tolkien created the word to define a different view of myth from C. S. Lewis's "lies breathed through silver", writing the poem "Mythopoeia" to present his argument; it was first published in *Tree and Leaf* in 1988.[9]

f. See the lead images in the articles on the three separate volumes, e.g. *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

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