



The Lord of the Rings

J.R.R. Tolkien , Brian Sibley (Adapter) , Ian Holm (Narrator)

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A fantastic starter set for new Tolkien fans or readers interested in rediscovering the magic of Middle-earth, this three-volume box set features paperback editions of the complete trilogy -- *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King* -- each with art from the New Line Productions feature film on the cover.

J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy is a genuine masterpiece. The most widely read and influential fantasy epic of all time, it is also quite simply one of the most memorable and beloved tales ever told. Originally published in 1954, *The Lord of the Rings* set the framework upon which all epic/quest fantasy since has been built. Through the urgings of the enigmatic wizard Gandalf, young hobbit Frodo Baggins embarks on an urgent, incredibly treacherous journey to destroy the One Ring. This ring -- created and then lost by the Dark Lord, Sauron, centuries earlier -- is a weapon of evil, one that Sauron desperately wants returned to him. With the power of the ring once again his own, the Dark Lord will unleash his wrath upon all of Middle-earth. The only way to prevent this horrible fate from becoming reality is to return the Ring to Mordor, the only place it can be destroyed. Unfortunately for our heroes, Mordor is also Sauron's lair. *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy is essential reading not only for fans of fantasy but for lovers of classic literature as well...

Librarian's note: this edition shares an ISBN with the 2004 edition published by Houghton Mifflin Company

The Lord of the Rings Details

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From Reader Review The Lord of the Rings for online ebook

Bookdragon Sean says

Writing a review of this masterpiece is impossible. I can't do it.

There's too much to talk about and I love it far too much to articulate my thoughts in a normal way. So instead I've picked one element of each book that I liked the most (taken from my list of ten on each review) and added them here. It's the best I can do, though I know many goodreads users share my difficulty when reviewing this book.

Anyway, here's my top three:

1. Finding your courage- *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Not all the party have been fully tested. With them travel four young hobbits, the most unlikely of companions for such a journey. They are the overlooked, the forgotten about, the race that is casually discarded and considered insignificant in the wider world. And perhaps this has been the downfall of society in middle earth previously. The forces of darkness exploit everything they can get their hands on, from giant spiders to rampaging trolls, from dragons to orcs, from men of the east to the undead, Sauron tries to wield it all. This is something the forces of good have not fully considered until recently. Within the bosom of the hobbit beats a strong heart of fortitude and resilience.

"My dear Frodo!" exclaimed Gandalf. 'Hobbits really are amazing creatures, as I have said before. You can learn all that there is to know about their ways in a month, and yet after a hundred years they can still surprise you at a pinch."

They carry with them the key to destroying the dark. Bilbo showed them how he could resist the ring. The hobbits are an *almost* incorruptible race, and because of this they are Sauron's doom. It is something he has overlooked.

"It would be the death of you to come with me, Sam," said Frodo, "and I could not have borne that."

"Not as certain as being left behind," said Sam.

"But I am going to Mordor."

"I know that well enough, Mr. Frodo. Of course you are. And I'm coming with you."

2. Gandalf the White - *The Two Towers*

"Do I not say truly, Gandalf," said Aragorn at last, 'that you could go whithersoever you wished quicker than I? And this I also say: you are our captain and our banner. The Dark Lord has Nine. But we have One, mightier than they: the White Rider. He has passed through the fire and the abyss, and they shall fear him. We will go where he leads.

Gandalf the Grey was charming and quirky; he was everybody's friend and advisor. But he was also a great wonderer and a great quester. He was an unearther of dark secrets and mysteries. And Middle-Earth no longer needs such a figure, darkness is now on her doorstep; it is no longer hidden. So Middle-Earth needs a man (or Istari) with far sight that can unite the scattered forces of Rohan and manipulate events in order to ensure that the King does, indeed, return. It needs a methodical man of great wisdom and intelligence; it needs a stagiest: it needs a new white wizard now that Saruman has changed his colours. And he has come.

3. Girl Power!-*The Return of the King*

“What do you fear, lady?” [Aragorn] asked.

“A cage,” [Éowyn] said. “To stay behind bars, until use and old age accept them, and all chance of doing great deeds is gone beyond recall or desire.”

There have not been many moments for women to show their strength in this story. Arwen's moment in the films was non-existent in the book. Frodo was saved on the river by an Elf-lord called Glorfindel. So when Eowyn battled the Witch King, it is the first major moment Tolkien gave to a female hero. In a vastly male dominated genre, it was great to read this scene. If I have one criticism of Tolkien, it's that we didn't see more of such things.

And here's a gif I like:

Manny says

Considering that *The Lord of the Rings* is one of the most popular books of the last century, it's surprising to see how few reviews there are here. I get the impression that many people feel guilty about liking it. It's a phase you go through, and the less said about it, the better. I think this is unfair to the book, which, I am prepared to argue, is a whole lot better than it's generally made out to be; I don't think its huge success is just evidence that people have no taste. It's something that can be read at more than one level, and, before dismissing it, let's take a look at what those levels might be.

On the surface, it's a heroic fantasy novel, and quite a good one. It's a gripping, well-realized story, with an interesting fantasy world as background. Under the surface story, it's also clear that there's a moral discourse. It's not an allegory; as Tolkien points out in the foreword, he hated allegory, and we certainly don't have an in-your-face piece of Christian apology by numbers. None the less, the author has constructed some inspiring and thought-provoking symbols. The Ring confers great power, but the only way to defeat Sauron is to refuse that power, and destroy it, even at great personal cost. Frodo's self-sacrifice is quite moving. I also think that Gandalf is an unusually interesting Christ-figure; sufficiently so that many people refuse even to accept him as one, though, at least to me, the argument on that point seems convincing. He comes from Valinor, obviously the Heavenly Realm, to help the Free Peoples of the West. A central part of his message is the importance of mercy, as, in particular, shown by the memorable scene near the beginning, when he rebukes Frodo for wishing that Bilbo had killed Sméagol when he had the opportunity. As we discover,

Sméagol is finally the one person who can destroy the Ring. And let's not miss the obvious point that Gandalf is killed, and then returns reborn in a new shape. I find him vastly more sympathetic than C.S. Lewis's bland Aslan, and he is the book's most memorable character.

But I don't think the morality play is the real kernel either. What makes LOTR a unique book, and one of the most ambitious experiments in literary history, is Tolkien's use of names. All authors know how important names are, and use them to suggest character; though when you think about what is going on, it is rather surprising how much can be conveyed just by a name. Proust has a couple of long discussions about this, describing in great detail how the narrator's initial mental pictures of Balbec, Venice and the Guermantes family come just from the sounds of their names. Tolkien goes much further. Most of his names are based on a family of invented languages, linked by a vast complex of legends and histories, the greater part of which are invisible to the reader and only surface occasionally.

The astonishing thing is that the technique actually works. The interrelations between all the invented names and languages make Middle-Earth feel real, in a way no other fantasy world ever has. When some readers complain that characters and locations are hastily sketched, I feel they are missing the point. Tolkien was a philologist. He loved languages, words and names, and tracing back what the relationships between them say about their history. In LOTR, he's able to convey some of that love of language to his readers. You have to read the book more than once, but after a while it all comes together. To give just a few obvious examples, you see how "hobbit" is a debased form of the word *holbytla* ("hole-dweller") in the Old Norse-like language of Rohan, how the "mor" in "Moria" is the same as the one in "Mordor" and "morgul", and how Arwen Undómiel's name expresses her unearthly beauty partly through the element it shares with her ancestor Lúthien Tinúviel. There are literally hundred more things like this, most of which one perceives on a partly unconscious level. The adolescent readers who are typically captivated by LOTR are at a stage of their linguistic development when they are very sensitive to nuances of language, and programmed to pick them up; I can't help thinking that they are intuitively seeing things that more sophisticated readers may miss.

Perhaps the simplest way to demonstrate the magnitude of Tolkien's achievement is the fact that it's proven impossible to copy it; none of the other fantasy novels I've seen have come anywhere close. Tolkein's names lend reality to his world, because he put so much energy into the linguistic back-story, and before that worked for decades as a philologist. Basically, he was an extremely talented person who spent his whole life training to write *The Lord of the Rings*. In principle, I suppose other authors could have done the same thing. In practice, you have to be a very unusual person to want to live that kind of life.

Writing this down reminds me of one of the Sufi stories in *The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mullah Nasrudin*. The guy is invited to a posh house, and sees this incredibly beautiful, smooth lawn. It's like a billiard table. "I love your lawn!" he says. "What's the secret?"

"Oh," his host says, "It's easy. Just seed, water, mow and roll regularly, and anyone can do it!"

"Ah yes!" says the visitor, "And about how long before it looks like that?"

"Hm, I don't know," says the host. "Maybe... 800 years?"

Dolly says

I read Lord of the Rings first when I was about eleven or so, and then stayed up all night at a hip boy/girl party in the bathroom with Nathan O. ... talking about ents and elves and whether Tom Bombadil was God. Yes, I was a geeky child. However, all these years later, the story has stuck with me.

First a warning: Don't read Tolkien if you don't appreciate true-omnicient-narrator-style epics. Tolkien *isn't* a master character builder: he leaves all that to the reader's imagination. The agony in the Aragorn/Arwen romance -- so blatant and operatic in the movies -- was a longing look on Strider's face at Rivendell, an odd comment from Bilbo, and a short no-nonsense Appendix. As with many of the themes in this work, the romance and deep character relationships must be picked from between the lines.

And there is so much between the lines here. The world of Middle-earth lives, utterly lives. Instead of tugging on what-ifs, this fantasy forces readers to imagine. Tolkien's work is the fullest realization of literary world building ever penned.

It is also sophisticated writing, drawing on older forms (epic, romance, tragedy). Tolkien doesn't waste time writing snappy dialogue: the story is too epic to dwindle to individual persons. However, voice shifts subtly depending on point of view: chapters dealing with hobbits contain much more dialogue and detail; chapters dealing with Rohirrim have a poetic rhythm reminiscent of extant Middle English works; chapters dealing with elves are magic and blurry and hard to wrap a mind around. These shifts in style, far from being a novice writer's oops, are intentional and serve as mass characterisation of races and groups. So, what Tolkien foregoes in terms of dialogue he replaces with style and action: a classic example of show not tell.

Having just spouted all that praise, I have to admit that all the criticisms are true: the story does resound with Luddite anti-industrial metaphors, overt Christian themes of salvation and spirit, a structural decision to include songs that doesn't quite work, and fantasy tropes that are now cliche ... now that everyone else has copied them, that is. The thing to remember is that this book started the genre: everything fantasy, from Philip Pullman to George RR Martin, exists in the shadow of this opus.

So, no, it isn't a popcorn read. Get over it. If you invest the time and spirit to read this work, you will be glad you did.

Evgeny says

I decided to read a one-book edition of the classic, just the way it was written. I will however split my discussion between three parts of it. I need to mention that I will not bother hiding any spoilers as I have trouble believing any modern person living in civilized enough parts of the world to have internet access has not read this one or at least has not seen the movies – which for all their faults were decent, but I am not talking about that abomination called the movie version of The Hobbit.

For the very brief synopsis of the plot I will quote Brandon Sanderson's brilliant description from his Alcatraz series. *A furry-legged British guy had to throw his uncle's ring into a crack in the ground.* As I mentioned before I hope everybody and their brother are familiar with the plot, so the only purpose this description serves is pure amusement.

My first time I read this I was quite young. The end of the book (I will refer to this work as a book, not a trilogy) gave me the worst book hangover I ever had before. Much later on I saw the movies and reread it. I matured and became more bitter and cynical. My initial rating of 5 stars still stands. This is a classic of epic

fantasy against which all other epic fantasy works were judged up until now and will be judged in the foreseeing future.

There is a reason countless carbon copies of this epic exist – of different quality. Terry Brooks' *Sword of Shannara* comes to mind immediately. It is very much arguable whether it was different enough not to be called a blatant rip-off, but the next two parts of his trilogy were different enough. What would happen if you replace Frodo with a biggest whining asshole you can think of and leave everything else intact: a guy who loves speaking in bad poetry, the Council that gave birth to the Fellowship, and the freaking ring itself? You would get *Thomas Covenant* series by Stephen R. Donaldson; it gets recommended a lot and for some reason nobody is bothered by its similarities to *The Lord of the Rings*. These two are just the best-known examples.

It would be very much unfair to call *The Lord of the Rings* the first work of fantasy. Lord Dunsany, Robert E. Howard, and others were writing what is considered fantasy today way before J.R.R. Tolkien. By the way while style of Lord Dunsany is a little hard to read in modern days, Howard's *Conan* is still great. Tolkien was probably the best at world-building in fantasy rivalled only by Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* and it took latter 15 huge books to do.

To my complete surprise I found the book an easy read on my second time through. Even the dreaded endless poetry did not bother me too much and no, I did not skip over it. Tolkien's writing style – when it does not slip into epic-ness in the third part – makes it a nice read.

What follows is my criticism of some occasional flaws in otherwise great classic epic fantasy book. I will split it into three parts to keep some semblance of organization.

The Fellowship of the Ring.

I was very curious to discover that Tolkien uses goblins and orcs interchangeably. In *The Hobbit* Bilbo found the fateful ring in Goblin's caves. When this story was briefly retold in *The Lord of the Rings*, goblins became orcs. In modern fantasy these two races are very much distinct. I always imagine goblins to be green guys on a weak side, more like bothersome troublemakers while orcs are brutes with tusks and armed for a battle.

Initially it took Frodo a while to get his behind moving and a because of this a lot of people complain about slow start. I was one of the complainers during my first read, but I found I like the slow-moving beginning the second time around. You will get a big picture of pastoral life in Shire to fully appreciate what would be lost to darkness.

Tom Bombadil gets my award for being the most pointless character ever to grace a work of fantasy. This would be the only part where the movie did better than the original source: the former skipped his parts completely. To quote one of the person who commented on this and who said it much better than I could, “The end of the world is coming and we have a character happily singing songs about himself in his small corner of Middle Earth”. Add to this his annoying habit of speaking in bad poetry and my award is entirely justified.

What the heck happened to Radagast? He was supposed to be a great wizard equal to both Saruman and Gandalf, however after unwittingly sending the latter to a trap he disappeared without a trace.

In my humble opinion this is still the best third of the whole book.

The Two Towers.

Please correct me if I am wrong, but I think Tolkien created the first fantasy trilogy (if you consider his big book being split in three parts by the publisher). In this case he was also the guy who created the first Middle Book of a Trilogy Syndrome case. The idea is that the first book has to have an interesting beginning of a conflict and the last book has to have an exciting conclusion which leaves the second book with the boring job of building a bridge between the two. The Two Towers clearly shows this.

I also do believe that the second part about Frodo and Sam being miserable can be made much shorter without any loss.

I have the impression that while Tolkien tried to show the tragedy of a war, he still glorifies battles if they are fought for the just cause. Much later it was Glen Cook in his Black Company who showed that war is a really dirty business, no matter what side.

The Return of the King.

Once again the part about the misery of Frodo and Sam can be shortened, but not to the extent as in The Two Towers. It looks like the editors were asleep at their job as much at the time the book was written as they are now.

Did anybody else had the impression that Gandalf the White was more useless overall than Gandalf the Grey?

Did you notice that Sauron never ever makes a personal appearance? Tolkien made an excellent job of creating a menacing bad guy without showing him even once.

This was also probably the first time an extremely annoying trope was used: take a pity of a bad guy and let him go only to have him backstab you later (Saruman). This one made an appearance countless times ever since and by now really overstayed its welcome.

The last line of the book is brilliant and is as a perfect ending as it could possibly be. I only found one other fantasy series which came close to this perfection: the aforementioned Black Company by Glen Cook.

This part is shorter as it contains numerous appendices, notes, etc. Reading them actually gave me a headache. They do contain some minimalistic info about the further fates of surviving characters. To make a long story short the mortal guys died with time. There, I saved you troubles of suffering through 200+ pages.

I also realized that Middle Earth is not a nice place to live as wars were raging non-stop through its long history.

In the conclusion I have a seemingly unrelated advice to my American friends. Do you have a tough choice in November between voting for a really bad person and an equally bad person? I will make it easy for you:

Luffy says

The Fellowship of the Ring begins with the Shire and winds its way through the barren lands that lie on the way to Mordor. I tried to read this part of the book once, but DNF it then. Then I picked up the trilogy bound in one volume and went through it fairly steadily.

I've read that Tolkien wasn't as original as first claimed. There is a book called The Broken Sword that has parallels with LotR. Nevertheless Tolkien's take on traditional myths was unique and groundbreaking. The Eddas, the Welsh myths, and Norse myths all are the foundation for this great story.

This was a reread and was a satisfactory one because I wanted to reach my favorite parts. I looked forward to read Tom Bombadil's part again. Did it. Then the Rivendell parts, ditto. Slowly I wound my way, sometimes following Sam and Frodo, sometimes Aragorn. Gandalf appears relatively scantily towards the third book. I had a lot of fun reading LoTR, and I've not yet deleted it from my Ereader because I'm tempted to reread it soon. Five well deserved stars, indeed.

Manny says

Look at thisss, hobbitses! Not bought at flea market for ten francses. Catalogue says worth seven hundred dollarses. Oh yes, Not knows about bookses, gollum. But can't touch, can't read, she says too valuable. Going to eat fish instead, but nice birthday present, oh yes precious.

?????? ???? says

[Bulgarian review below/?????? ?? ?????????? ? ??-????](#)

The pilgrimage of Frodo, Sam and their fellows lasted for a year, and it happened so that it took me nearly as long to see them home to the Shire. Well, people say good things happen slowly, so I don't regret the journey one bit.

Something crosses my mind that Terry Pratchett has shared in 'A Slip of the Keyboard'. He was 12 or 13 when he read 'The Lord of the Rings' for the first time. His parents left him at some neighbors' house to babysit their children while all the adults went visit somebody. To pass the time Terry (who as all boys wasn't very keen on reading) got absorbed in the 'LoTR' and suddenly the Shire had spread out in his imagination and the edges of the shabby carpet turned in the Shire's borders and beyond them adventures were awaiting. So, Terry Pratchett read all night long and for the whole next day too. He read the novel for 26 hours (with some small breaks, of course – the bladder of a 12-year-old is not a water-skin after all). In the years to come he continued to reread the book each year. This is how it goes, brilliant minds resonate in accord.

When I was almost finished with the novel I realized that 'The Lord of the Rings' is actually an allegory of the human life. There is a spirit of idyll in the Shire, days are lazy and sometimes tinted with mischievousness, and Gandalf's visits are sheer feasts – that looks very much like childhood perhaps. Then you step outside the hobbit hole and the limits of the known and you plunge into adventures – you had been yearning so much to lose those familiar faces for a while and see if some glorious song might be sung for you too. The journey starts jolly, one repast follows another (the food in the first part is indeed quite abundant – Tolkien himself says that *'If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world'*), you sing songs, admire everything new and your eyes are as big as pancakes as you try to perceive all novelties that happen to you – I suppose that's the period of youth. After that though

you slowly realize that you carry a truly heavy burden on your shoulders, that you have responsibilities and failure means too much, it means the world. Songs are noticeably fewer, you sing once in a blue moon and it's only to give yourself courage and to remember the past when things used to be simple, and not to enjoy yourself. And like in life there are glimpses of hope, but also precipitous collapses in pitch-dark depths, you are sometimes alone among the multitude and sometimes there is a friend to lend you a helping hand, and you put one foot in front of the other and keep going because you know that nobody is going to wage that battle for you. And you rely on the flickering hope that one day you could sigh 'I'm finally back'.

There is some very sweet melancholy seeped through Tolkien's world or at least I felt it that way. The verdure and meadows in the Shire, to fight for the world, but also for your tiny homeland, though it will never be the same, to do all you are capable of for what you know is good and right (view spoiler)

Choose a dauntless pony (let his name be Bill for example) or a proud steed as Shadowfax and ride through the Middle-earth. There be wonders.

Who can say where the road goes?

Where the day flows?

Only Time

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*Who can say where the road goes?  
Where the day flows?  
Only Time*

Leo . says

The true source of the fantasy fiction genre. Tolkien has spawned so many fantasy writers since The Lord Of The Rings went into print. I love all the earlier ones too like Verne and Carrol and CS Lewis but The Hobbit and The Lord Of The Rings its like an institution.??

Who else, besides me, has the notion that the real hero in the Lord Of The Rings story is Sam? Sam is the typical accidental hero. He is the girl or boy next door, the ordinary folk. Sam is you and me and represents the courage we all have inside of us. He shows that when the going gets tough and the shit hits the fan it is the most unlikely of us that step up. Hero's are not always musclebound hunks. Not always the James Bond type character or the brilliant lawyer bringing justice to the deserving. Almost all of the time the hero is the one that does the things that go unnoticed, uncelebrated. There is a hero in all of us whether we know it or not.??

A Hobbit finds himself on a quest that will change his life

An adventure full, of peril and strife

An ancient evil is rising, to come forth again

Like a dark cancer, enveloping, causing suffering and pain

A gold ring will help Frodo on his way, make him invisible to all near by

But give away his location, as Sauron see's him, from most high

Like the all seeing eye of Lucifer, the eye from the skies

And Frodo is in extreme danger, as a dark army begins to rise.

Strider, and Legolas, and Gimley will aid him and Samwise Gamgee

And Meriadoc Brandybuck, and Peregrin Took, and Gandalf, to complete the band of brothers, a family

Gollum, the sinister one, the gold ring an obsession

Gollum wants it back, from Fodo's possession

A tale of great adventure, fantasy of the highest esteem

Tolkien was a master, to me, that's all he has ever been. ??

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### **Brad says**

Twenty-five years ago I'd have given *The Lord of the Rings* my highest possible praise. I came to Tolkien's masterpiece on my own, and that meant much to me at twelve. The only books that had been reached by me alone were books on mythology and horror. Everything else I read, from DH Lawrence to Hemingway to Dickens to Shakespeare (and this also included *Dracula* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* because they were "true" classics), was suggested and sanctioned by my mother (for which I will always owe her deeply).

But *The Lord of the Rings* was mine and mine alone.

It is easy to forget that *The Lord of the Rings* was not a pop culture phenomenon in the seventies and early eighties. It was a fringe book (at least in North America), something that was not yet considered a part of the canon, something that was not a name on every boy's lips (even if they were just getting to know D&D) let alone every child's lips. Sure it was respected and loved by those who knew it, but knowing it was not a foregone conclusion as it is today, and its audience was almost completely genre oriented. In my little community (my school and the blocks surrounding my home), I was the first kid to read it.

And that first reading was a revelation. Sure I'd read *The Hobbit*, but that didn't prepare me for the breadth and depth of *The Lord of the Rings*. Middle Earth in its grandest incarnation.

To create a fantasy world is one thing, but to breathe life into ages of that world, to keep all the pieces together with such magnificent detail and rigour, to create character after believable character and make us care about most of them, even poor Smeagol/Gollum, that is a literary labour of Hercules. And by pulling it off, Tolkien created the single most important manifestation of Fantasy that has ever and will ever be written. *The Lord of the Rings* has rightly been named a classic. It is part of the canon, and it deserves its place. It is entertaining, it is weighty, and it is loved by nearly all.

Aye...and there's the rub.

Its indisputable greatness has made it *indisputable*.

It has become dogma among fanboys and fangirls that the bastions of *The Lord of the Rings* are unassailable. Criticize Tolkien's work -- academically or otherwise -- and you put yourself in almost as much danger as a chatty atheist trying to engage in a theological discussion in a coliseum full of Jehovah's Witnesses (how many of those folks will make it into the afterlife? Isn't there a limit?).

Feminist critics point out the lack of women in The Lord of the Rings, and that those women who are present fulfill only the narrowest stereotypes. Éowyn's strength is dependent upon adopting male gender qualities, a typical stereotype of "powerful women in fantasy," and she is alone amongst the Rohirrim as a woman who can and will fight. All other women in her culture are present as a reason to fight rather than as integral parts of the struggle. Arwen's place (in the books, at least) as a maiden waiting for the hand of her king takes the "reason to fight" to even greater heights. And the only powerful female, Galadriel as the terrible, beautiful elven Queen, is too far removed from mortality and reality to be anything more than a mid-tale *deus ex machina*, thereby removing her from the realm of women and men and making her a pseudo-god whose power is allowed only because it is arcane and mysterious.

Post-Colonial critics have latched onto the racism inherent in The Lord of the Rings, pointing out the hierarchies between the races: from the "superiority" of the elves, to the "chosen" role of "European" Men of the West under the leadership of Aragorn, to the lesser races of Dwarves and Hobbits (the former are "lesser" because they are "too greedy" and the latter are "lesser" because they are children). Post-Colonialists look to the "orientalization" of Sauron's forces and the configuration of evil as an inherent quality of Orcs and "the dark folk." They point out Tolkien's family's history as a cog in the mechanism of English Imperialism, and his own birth in one of the most blatantly racist colonies of all, South Africa (while he did leave at three years old, his family's presence there at all suggests that some of the classic colonial opinions about the colonized "dark races" helped form the man who wrote these books), as possible reasons for this racism.

These criticisms further suggest, at least to me, that the archetypal source of all fantasy's entrenched racism -- even those books being written today -- is The Lord of the Rings. Those fantasy authors who have followed Tolkien consistently and inescapably embrace his configuration of the races (yes, even those like R.A. Salvatore who try and fail to derail this configuration) and the concepts of good and evil that go along with them, which leads to the stagnation and diminishment of their genre.

The fact is that these flaws do exist in The Lord of the Rings. They are present. They are easy to find. But few of Tolkien's rabid fans want to hear about them.

And even when the criticism is not necessarily suggesting a flaw in Tolkien's work but merely the presence of some subtext, the dogmatists react with rage and condemnation. A fine example of this is when Queer and Gender theorists point to the overwhelming relationships between men, and how the relationship between Frodo and Sam is homosocial, at least, and possibly even homosexual. The only true intimacy in the book occurs between the men, after all, and to ignore that fact is to ignore one of key components of why The Lord of the Rings is so emotionally satisfying, especially to young men.

Even faced with these ideas supported by convincing arguments, however, many fans either strive for ignorance or attack the messenger. This may have much to do with the worry -- unreasonable though it is -- that to admit that a flaw or something uncomfortable exists in any of these books, which so many people love so deeply, is to accept that The Lord of the Rings is neither great nor worthy of love.

But this is not the case.

I love The Lord of the Rings even though I subscribe completely to the post-colonial criticism, and see the merits in both the feminine and queer criticisms, not to mention the countless other criticisms and subtexts that are floating around.

The books are racist; they are sexist. They are not perfect. And I must criticize the elements of The Lord of the Rings that make me uncomfortable and deserve no praise. But my complaints and the complaints of

critics make Tolkien's achievement no less great.

Tolkien created the most magnificent imaginary world ever conceived, and, for good or ill, Fantasy would be nothing today were it not for him. The Lord of the Rings is a triumph on countless levels, but it is not the word of God, nor should it be elevated to such heights.

I love The Lord of the Rings, but I love it with reservations. I love it because of its place in my personal mythology, its genuine originality, its creativity, its power, but I love it with my mind open to its flaws, and I refuse to make excuses for Tolkien or his work.

Twenty-five years ago I'd have given The Lord of the Rings my highest possible praise. Not today. But I am still willing to admit my love.

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### **mark monday says**

not a review and there probably won't be one any time soon. i also won't be climbing Mount Everest in the near future. but here are some cool illustrations that i found and want to share.

*World of the Ring* by Jian Guo

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### **Markus says**

*Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,  
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,  
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,*

***One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne  
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.***

***One Ring to rule them all,  
One Ring to find them,  
One Ring to bring them all  
And in the darkness bind them  
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.***

Three thousand years after the defeat of the Dark Lord Sauron before the slopes of Mount Doom, a magic ring falls into the care of Frodo Baggins, a young hobbit from the Shire. Aided by his gardener Samwise Gamgee and the mysterious wizard Gandalf the Grey, he takes the ring on a journey to Rivendell, a hidden refuge of the Elves. But evil stirs in the fell lands of Mordor, and black riders scour the countryside in search of their master's most prized possession...

Thus begins the most legendary saga in the history of fantasy.

***"It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to."***

I'll kick off this review by telling a little story. A story starting, as the stories often do, with 'once upon a time'...

Once upon a time, there was a little boy who have never read a fantasy book. Thinking back on it, it does seem like an awfully sorry state of affairs. He was a devoted reader already as a quite small child, but he mostly read children's books like *The Hardy Boys* and other juvenile and boyish stories like them. The one day he discovered this huge brick called *The Lord of the Rings*, and started reading it. It would change his life forever. There were other books at the time, for instance the immensely popular *Harry Potter* series, which was being published back then, but none of them could ever hope to compare to what was now the little boy's favourite book.

The little boy grew into adolescence. He read other books, few of them fantasy. He discovered a passion for history, and started reading that. He read classics and sci-fi and mysteries and even religious texts. He read books considered by some as among the best books ever. And none of them could ever hope to compare to what was still the boy's favourite book.

Later that little boy would grow up to become a man (though he probably never will grow up completely, mind you). And he started reading fantasy again. *A Song of Ice and Fire* was one of the first attempts, and it quickly turned into a favourite. But compared to *The Lord of the Rings*? Nothing. It was followed by tons of other fantasy series, among them *Narnia*, *The Inheritance Cycle*, *Shannara* and so on. And he loved them all. But every once in a while, he had to go back to this huge brick to remember that there existed something even better.

***"Where now the horse and the rider? Where is the horn that was blowing?  
Where is the helm and the hauberk, and the bright hair flowing?  
Where is the hand on the harpstring, and the red fire glowing?  
Where is the spring and the harvest and the tall corn growing?  
They have passed like rain on the mountain, like a wind in the meadow;  
The days have gone down in the West behind the hills into shadow."***

I have been struggling for years to describe *The Lord of the Rings*. How do you actually describe the book you both love more than any other, and also consider the best book ever written from a more or less objective point of view?

I recently dumped into the word sublime, which I've only heard used on a few occasions before. I knew what it meant, but not the exact definition. So I checked.

- Of high spiritual, moral, or intellectual worth.
- Not to be excelled; supreme.
- Inspiring awe; impressive.
- An ultimate example.

And that is pretty much exactly how I would describe it. Sublime it is. I realised that I would never come closer to an actual description of *The Lord of the Rings*. This is to me not only the main pillar on which the fantasy genre stands, but the ultimate masterpiece of literature.

I'll use a far-fetched example to ~~make my love for this book sound totally crazy~~ put my love for this book in perspective: if I had to choose between reading this book once and having unlimited access to all the other books ever released, then I would choose this. No contest even.

I am so very grateful to have been given the chance to come along on the journey of the Fellowship of the Ring. To visit so many wonderful places in a land of myths and magic. To meet so many fascinating men, elves, dwarves and other legendary peoples and creatures...

Are there any negative things to mention? No. In my mind there are none at all, but I'll say this: Tolkien's characters are not the best I have encountered, and the storyline of this book is not perfect. That's the closest you'll ever come to witness me criticizing this wondrous gem, and the only things you'll ever hear from me about it except for fanatical ravings and unsolicited praise.

*I sit beside the fire and think  
of people long ago  
and people who will see a world  
that I shall never know.*

*But all the while I sit and think  
of times there were before,  
I listen for returning feet  
and voices at the door.*

If perfection exists and is obtainable, then Tolkien's worldbuilding is perfect. There is nothing in either fantasy or any other genre to match it. It certainly surpassed all the magical worlds that had come before it, and none created since that time have been able to surpass it in turn. Writers like Robert Jordan and George R.R. Martin have made their attempts, and now we're talking about more of my all-time favourite fantasy worlds and series, but in my eyes, none of them have even come close.

I have had tons of delightful experiences while venturing into magnificent worlds of fantasy, in Westeros and Narnia and so many others. But Middle-Earth is like a fictional home. I seem to have left behind parts of my heart and soul by the waterfalls of Rivendell, the ancient trees of Fangorn forest, the plains of Rohan and the marble walls of Minas Tirith. And I do not regret that for one second.

Most of my standards for comparison also derive from this tome. I have yet to encounter a mentor character in fantasy who can compare to Gandalf, or a fictional love story that can compare to the tale of Aragorn and Arwen. I have yet to encounter a setting as detailed or writing as flawlessly eloquent as this. And those are only a few examples of aspects in which I consider *The Lord of the Rings* to be superior to all others.

These musings can only begin to describe how much this book means to me. It sparked my passion for reading at a young age. It made me love the fantasy genre and all that came with it. It made me start creating worlds of my own, and in the end find one in particular that I liked so much I started writing stories set in it. Why, it even made me intrigued by poetry eventually. But I have yet to read anything by any famous poet that can match Tolkien's utterly incredible poems.

On my third and fourth and fifth reads of this book, I started looking beyond the immediately visible. And I found something more to admire: the man himself. John Ronald Reuel Tolkien went on to become my most important role model, and despite having been gone from this world for forty years, he's been heavily influencing my personal opinions and choices for more than a decade. And not only literarily, but historically, politically and philosophically as well.

This book is definitely the one single object that's had the most impact on me, and it's meant a lot more to me than one should think any object could be capable of. But then again it's not really an object after all. It is so much more. A legend trapped in words on pieces of paper. A magical gateway to the most amazing world you'll ever see.

This is to me the apex of human creativity and imagination. The very best form of art a human mind can produce.

There have been many books that I have cherished through the years, and I expect there will be many more to come. But *The Lord of the Rings* will always be the one I treasure the most of them all.

It has changed me forever. As it once changed the world forever.

***"I amar prestar aen, han mathon ne nen, han mathon ne chae a han noston ned 'wilith."***

So that's all I have to say for now. I'm afraid this was not so much an actual review as simply a story about my experience with and passion for this book. If you've been patient enough to read to the very end, I thank you for your attention. I'll leave you with the most beautiful passage Tolkien ever wrote, and my favourite literary quote of all time...

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## Ahmad Sharabiani says

494. The Lord of The Rings (The Lord of the Rings #1-3), J.R.R. (John Ronald Reuel) Tolkien  
The Lord of the Rings is an epic high fantasy novel written by English author and scholar J. R. R. Tolkien. The story began as a sequel to Tolkien's 1937 fantasy novel 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 novels ever written, with over 150 million copies sold.

The title of the novel refers to the story's main antagonist, the Dark Lord Sauron, 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. (Nineteen of these rings were made. These were grouped into three rings for the Elves, seven rings for the Dwarves, and nine rings for men. One additional ring, the One Ring, was forged by Sauron himself at Mount Doom.). From quiet beginnings in the Shire, a hobbit land not unlike the English countryside, the story ranges across Middle-earth, following the course of the War of the Ring through the eyes of its characters, not only the hobbits Frodo Baggins, Samwise "Sam" Gamgee, Meriadoc "Merry" Brandybuck and Peregrin "Pippin" Took, but also the hobbits' chief allies and travelling companions: the Men, Aragorn son of Arathorn, a Ranger of the North, and Boromir, a Captain of Gondor; Gimli son of Glóin, a Dwarf warrior; Legolas Greenleaf, an Elven prince; and Gandalf, a wizard.

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## **Kristin Little says**

Save time... watch the movies. This book can appeal only to a linguist. The underlying story is great, but it is buried under an avalanche of horribly annoying songs and poems that do nothing to advance the story. They just take up space. I diligently read every last one, hoping that they held some deep meaning in relation to the story, but if there is one, it is so obscure that it serves no purpose. Also, the book is all about walking. Yes, I know they are on an epic quest, and there has to be soul-searching, etc., but the amount of detail regarding the walking is a snoozer! 45 pages of walking and 3 pages for a huge battle. AUGH! I know that this is a masterpiece, and I agree that the plot line is a beautiful tale of good and evil and power and corruption. However, reading this series was a drudgery. The only really good part that you miss in the movies is when the hobbits return to the Shire in the last three chapters of The Return of the King. If you want a Tolkien fix, I'd recommend The Hobbit.

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## **J.G. Keely says**

Authors who inspire a movement are usually misunderstood, especially by those they have inspired, and Tolkien is no exception, but one of the biggest misconceptions about Tolkien is the idea that he is somehow an 'innovator of fantasy'. He did add a number of techniques to the repertoire of epic fantasy writers, and these have been dutifully followed by his many imitators, but for the most part, these techniques are little more than bad habits.

Many have called Tolkien by such epithets as 'The Father of Fantasy', but anyone who makes this claim simply does not know of the depth and history of the fantasy genre. For those who are familiar with the great and influential fantastical authors, from Ovid and Ariosto to Eddison and Dunsany to R.E. Howard and Fritz Leiber, it is clear that, long before Tolkien, fantasy was already a complex, well-established, and even a respected literary genre.

Eddison's work contains an invented world, a carefully-constructed (and well-researched) archaic language, a powerful and unearthly queen, and a central character who is conflicted and lost between the forces of nobility and darkness. Poul Anderson's *The Broken Sword*, which came out the same year as The Fellowship of the Ring, has distant, haughty elves, deep-delving dwarves, a broken sword which must be reforged, an epic war between the armies of light and darkness, another central character trapped between those extremes, and an interweaving of Christian and Pagan worldviews.

So, if these aspects are not unique to Tolkien, then what does set him apart? Though Dunsany, Eddison, and Anderson all present worlds where light and dark come into conflict, they present these conflicts with a subtle and often ironic touch, recognizing that morality is a dangerous thing to present in absolutes. Tolkien (or C.S. Lewis), on the other hand, has no problem in depicting evil as evil, good as good, and the only place they meet is in the temptation of an honest heart, as in Gollum's case--and even then, he is not like Eddison's Lord Gro or Anderson's Scafloc, characters who live under an alternative view of the world, but instead fluctuates between the highs and lows of Tolkien's dualistic morality.

It is a dangerous message to make evil an external, irrational thing, to define it as 'the unknown that opposes us', because it invites the reader to overlay their own morality upon the world, which is precisely what most modern fantasy authors tend to do, following Tolkien's example. Whether it's Goodkind's Libertarianism or John Norman's sex slave fetish, it's very easy to simply create a magical allegory to make one side 'right' and

the other side 'wrong', and you never have to develop a dramatic narrative that actually explores the soundness of those ideas. Make the good guys dress in bright robes or silvery maile and the bad guys in black, spiky armor, and a lot of people will never notice that all the 'good guys' are White, upper class men, while all the 'bad guys' are 'brutish foreigners', and that both sides are killing each other and trying to rule their little corner of the world.

In Tolkien's case, his moral view was a very specific evocation of the ideal of 'Merrie England', which is an attempt by certain stodgy old Tories (like Tolkien) to rewrite history so that the nobility were all good and righteous leaders, the farmers were all happy in their 'proper place' (working a simple patch of dirt), while both industrialized cultures and the 'primitives' who resided to the South and East were 'the enemy' bent on despoiling the 'natural beauty of England' (despite the fact that the isles had been flattened, deforested, and partitioned a thousand years before).

Though Tom Bombadil remains as a strangely incoherent reminder of the moral and social complexity of the fantasy tradition upon which Tolkien draws, he did his best to scrub the rest clean, spending years of his life trying to fit Catholic philosophy more wholly into his Pagan adventure realm. But then, that's often how we think of Tolkien: bent over his desk, spending long hours researching, note-taking, compiling, and playing with language. Even those who admit that Tolkien demonstrates certain racist, sexist, and classicist leanings (as, indeed, do many great authors) still praise the complexity of his 'world building'.

And any student of the great Epics, like the Norse Eddas, the Bible, or the Shahnameh can see what Tolkien is trying to achieve with his worldbuilding: those books presented grand stories, but were also about depicting a vast world of philosophy, history, myth, geography, morality and culture. They were encyclopedic texts, intended to instruct their people on everything important in life, and they are extraordinarily valuable to students of anthropology and history, because even the smallest detail can reveal something about the world which the book describes.

So, Tolkien fills his books with troop movements, dull songs, lines of lineage, and references to his own made-up history, mythology, and language. He has numerous briefly-mentioned side characters and events because organic texts like the epics, which were formed slowly, over time and compiled from many sources often contained such digressions. He creates characters who have similar names--which is normally a stupid thing to do, as an author, because it is so confusing--but he's trying to represent a hereditary tradition of prefixes and suffixes and shared names, which many great families of history had. So Tolkien certainly had a purpose in what he did, but was it a purpose that served the story he was trying to tell?

Simply copying the form of reality is not what makes good art. Art is meaningful--it is directed. It is not just a list of details--everything within is carefully chosen by the author to make up a good story. The addition of detail is not the same as adding depth, especially since Tolkien's world is not based on some outside system--it is whatever he says it is. It's all arbitrary, which is why the only thing that grants a character, scene, or detail purpose is the meaning behind it. Without that meaning, then what Tolkien is doing is just a very elaborate thought exercise. Now, it's certainly true that many people have been fascinated with studying it, but that's equally true of many thought exercises, such as the rules and background of the Pokemon card game, or crossword puzzles.

Ostensibly, Scrabble supposedly is a game for people who love words--and yet, top Scrabble players sit and memorize lists of words whose meaning they will never learn. Likewise, many literary fandom games become little more than word searches: find this reference, connect that name to this character--but which have no meaning or purpose outside of that. The point of literary criticism is always to lead us back to human thought and ideas, to looking at how we think and express ourselves. If a detail in a work cannot lead us back

to ourselves, then it is no more than an arbitrary piece of chaff.

The popularity of Tolkien's work made it acceptable for other authors to do the same thing, to the point that whenever I hear a book lauded for the 'depth of its world building', I expect to find a mess of obsessive detailing, of piling on so many inconsequential facts and figures that the characters and stories get buried under the scree, as if the author secretly hopes that by spending most of the chapter describing the hero's cuirass, we'll forget that he's a bland archetype who only succeeds through happy coincidence and *deus ex machina* against an enemy with no internal structure or motivation.

When Quiller-Couch said authors should 'murder their darlings', this is what he meant: just because you have hobbies and opinions does not mean you should fill your novel with them. Anything which does not materially contribute to the story, characters, and artistry of a work can safely be left out. Tolkien's embarrassment of detail also produced a huge inflation in the acceptable length of fantasy books, leading to the meandering, unending series that fill bookstore shelves today.

Now, there are several notable critics who have lamented the unfortunate effect that Tolkien's work has had on the genre, such as in Moorcock's *Epic Pooh* and Mieville's diatribe about every modern fantasy author being forced to come to terms with the old don's influence. I agree with their deconstructions, but for me, Tolkien isn't some special author, some 'fantasy granddad' looming over all. He's just a bump in the road, one author amongst many in a genre that stretches back thousands of years into our very ideas of myth and identity, and not one of the more interesting ones

His ideas weren't unique, and while his approach may have been unusual, it was only because he spent a lifetime obsessively trying to make something artificial seem more natural, despite the fact that the point of fantasy (and fiction in general) is to explore the artificial, the human side of the equation, to look at the world through the biased lens of our eye and to represent some odd facet of the human condition. Unfortunately, Tolkien's characters, structure, and morality are all too flat to suggest much, no matter how many faux-organic details he surrounds them with.

## My Fantasy Book Suggestions

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### **Michael Finocchiaro says**

One of the greatest trilogies of all time and certainly the measuring stick to which all subsequent fantasy-style writing is compared, The Lord of the Rings trilogy still stands at the top of the stack. Its realism, the characters and monsters, the storyline, the epic battles, and the quest motif are all drawn with incredible care by Tolkien in his chef d'oeuvre. My favorite was The Two Towers but all three are absolutely stunning. It has been a few decades since I read them so perhaps this year I will have to journey back to Middle Earth once again.

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