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JRR Tolkien



Who was JRR Tolkien?

JRR Tolkien is the famous author who wrote *The Hobbit* as well as *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy on which the blockbuster films are based.

He was born as John Ronald Reul Tolkien on 3 January 1892 in a place called

Bloemfontein, South Africa. When he was three, he and his mum moved to England. But he had quite a sad childhood because his dad died when he was four. Then when he was 12, his mum died. Because his parents had died, Tolkien and his brother were sent to live with their aunt in Birmingham. Tolkien died in 1973, but his name lives through the millions who read his books worldwide.

What jobs did he have?

Tolkien grew up and joined the army when the First World War started in 1914. But, like many soldiers, he suffered badly from what was known as "shell shock". This means he was affected by the explosions physically - the thousands of loud bangs from bombs hurt his brain. But it also hurt him mentally and was upset about what he saw during the fighting. His best friend died in the war. He was let out of the army because he was so sick.

He got a job as lecturer in English Language at the University of Leeds then professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford University.

Why did he start writing?

In 1916, Tolkien started imagining the worlds which would be the settings for his classic fantasy tales. He set out the myths and legends of the First Age of Middle Earth in *The Book of Lost Tales*. But it wasn't published until after he died. It came out eventually in 1997 and was called *The Silmarillion*. He also started sketching out other ideas and characters. One of them was Bilbo Baggins, the hobbit.

What eventually became *The Hobbit* was meant to be bedtime stories for his children about the adventures of a little gnome-like fella with hairy feet! But it was published in 1937.

How did the LOTR start?

While he was a professor at Oxford, he became really good mates with the author CS Lewis. You may recognise his name - he wrote the Narnia novels.

Tolkien showed him and some other friends his rough drafts of what was to become the Lord of the Rings trilogy. They helped him by telling him what they thought of the complicated work, which took 17 years to complete! The group of friends became known as the Inklings.



What's the trilogy about?

The Lord of the Rings is made up of three books:

- The Fellowship of the Ring
- The Two Towers
- The Return of the King

The books follow the magical and dangerous adventures of Frodo Baggins, in whose hands the future of Middle Earth rests. The books follow on in a way from *The Hobbit* where we first meet Frodo's elderly cousin, Bilbo Baggins.

He is the first hobbit to find the powerful One Ring, which had been lost for centuries. He hands it down to Frodo. But the Ring is capable of evil and whoever has it can be made to do terrible things. It's Frodo's mission to take it to the fires of Mount Doom and destroy it.

The first two Lord of the Rings books were published in 1954 and *The Return of the Ring* came out in 1955.

The Lord of the Rings has sold some 100 million copies worldwide since then.

Names and places in LOTR

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When JRR Tolkien wrote the Lord of the Rings he didn't just give his characters any name he felt like.

All the names of people, things and places come from real people, old languages, or languages that he made himself. He used Old Norse, Old English and Finnish, as well as making up several Elvish

languages, Orcish and many others.

Here is a list of just a few words and their roots:

- **Frodo:** from *Frodi*, a Norse King.
- **Sam Gamgee:** Dr Sam Gamgee lived near Tolkien and invented a type of medical cotton wool.
- **Gandalf:** from Old Norse, it means *elf with a staff*.
- **Aragorn:** from Sindarin, an elvish language Tolkien made up, it means *King-Tree*.
- **Sauron:** from Old Norse, it means *abominable*.
- **Saruman:** from Old English, it means *cunning man*.
- **Legolas:** from Sindarin, it probably means *green-leaf*
- **Galadriel:** from Sindarin, meaning *tree-daughter*
- **Mordor:** from Old English, it means *murder* or *mortal sin*
- **Theoden:** King of Rohan, his name means *King* or *Lord of Men*
- **Edoras:** capital of Rohan, it means *enclosures*.
- **Grima:** he is a bit suspicious and his name means *mask*. *With thanks to Dr Thomas Shippey.*

