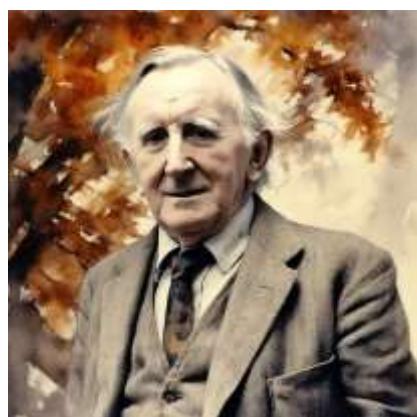


J.R.R. TOLKIEN



John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (J.R.R. Tolkien) was born on 3 January 1892, in South Africa. At age 4 he moved with his family to Great Britain. Even as a tween in boarding school, Tolkien demonstrated his remarkable gifts as a linguist. Beyond mastering Latin and Greek, he had a working knowledge of Spanish, Welsh, French, German, Finnish and Gothic (an extinct East Germanic language), and was already making up languages of his own for fun. Tolkien graduated from Oxford University in 1915. Soon afterward he left to fight for the British in World War I. In 1925 Tolkien began teaching at Oxford. During this time he began writing fantasy stories. Part of this writing included making up an entire language called Elvish. J.R.R. Tolkien's writing style is characterized by detailed world-building, richly detailed landscapes and a strong sense of mythology. He was also known for his creation of unique languages and alphabets, and his use of mythology, folklore, and medieval literature as inspiration for his stories.

The longest and most important of Tolkien's more whimsical stories was The Hobbit, a coming-of-age fantasy about a diminutive, comfort-loving being, Bilbo Baggins, who joins a quest for a dragon's treasure. The story takes place in a fantasy world called Middle-earth. Published in 1937, The Hobbit was so popular that its publisher asked for a sequel. The result, 17 years later, was J.R.R. Tolkien's masterpiece, The Lord of the Rings. While now routinely published in three parts—The Fellowship of the Ring, The Two Towers, and The Return of the King—The Lord of the Rings wasn't written as a trilogy. Running a whopping 1,728 pages, it was originally divided into three books to make it more marketable and to reduce the risk to its publisher should it fail to sell.

J.R.R. Tolkien's work has had a significant influence on popular culture. His books have inspired a wide range of fantasy literature, films, games and other media. The Lord of the Rings trilogy and The Hobbit have become cultural phenomenon and the world of Middle-earth has become a popular fantasy setting. Additionally, his work has also had a considerable influence on the development of the high fantasy genre. Examples of Tolkien's influence in the fantasy realm range from how George R.R. Martin built up his world of magic in his epic A Song of Ice and Fire series to Stephen King's use of a fictional language in The Dark Tower saga to numerous elements—a wizened old magician helping to guide the protagonist on their journey, an object infused with dark magic that affects the behaviour of those near it, a Dark Lord who seeks power and immortality—in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. Tolkien died on 2 September 1973. He had started another book about Middle-earth, called The Silmarillion, but did not finish it. Tolkien's youngest son, Christopher, published this book in 1977.