



Your Guide to The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings

Charles River Editors



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*Includes characters spotlights on the books' main characters, including Bilbo, Frodo, Gandalf, Aragorn and other important characters.

*Explains the origins of Middle Earth, its creatures, and its magic.

*Comprehensively covers the plot and themes of each book.

*Explains the books' legacy.

“In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.”

So starts one of Western literature's most epic journeys, *The Hobbit*, a fantasy novel that has delighted adults and children alike since it was published in 1937 by professor J.R.R. Tolkien. Ostensibly, *The Hobbit* is an adventurous tale about hobbit Bilbo Baggins, who leaves the cozy comforts of his home to try to win a share of a treasure guarded by a dragon named Smaug. The novel follows Bilbo and an assorted cast of magical characters and creatures, including dwarves, the wizard Gandolf, giants, goblins, and the mysterious Gollum. Tolkien brings so many different characters to life and keeps the plot moving at a fast enough pace that readers of all kinds have been easily engrossed reading the novel over the last 75 years.

Of course, there is a never-ending number of fantasy novels, so why has *The Hobbit* endured so long and remain as popular as ever before? Part of the reason comes from Tolkien's background as a professor well versed in Anglo-Saxon literature, which made him extremely familiar with old medieval fairy tales. Others have pointed to his experience in World War I as being responsible for the militaristic and heroic motifs found throughout his books. Furthermore, Tolkien manages to make his characters come across as down to earth, even in the midst of a fantasy world, and at the heart of the novel is a coming of age story that people on Planet Earth have always identified with.

The popularity of *The Hobbit* made Tolkien's publisher and audience want a follow-up involving his Middle Earth and hobbit creations. To say Tolkien eventually outdid himself in response would be a drastic understatement. What followed was the most famous trilogy of the fantasy genre, *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien drew upon his background and spent over a decade fashioning the history of his world and the characters, including some of the old (Gandalf and Bilbo) and a lot of the new (Frodo, Aragorn, Sam).

Though Tolkien's epic fantasy was published more than 50 years ago, it remains a stalwart piece of writing today. More than 150 million copies have been sold in more than 30 languages, and the trilogy is among the top-selling novels of all time.

Like *The Hobbit*, Tolkien's expertise with language and history inform the story, but *The Lord of the Rings* is a staggering, complex work for adults, not children. Tolkien took the themes from *The Hobbit* and revisited them, but this time he went even deeper. The corruptive nature of power and the many forms of bravery are once again front and center as major themes. Working together and the environmental degradation of industrialization and war are also themes woven through the work.



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