LITERATURE & HISTORY

who wrote lord of the rings

Published: September 3, 2026 | Index ID: #-

Quick Takeaways

- Primary Author: John Ronald Reuel (J.R.R.) Tolkien (1892–1973).
- Writing Period: Drafted between 1937 and 1949, spanning over 12 years of meticulous labor.
- Academic Background: Tolkien was a world-renowned Professor of Anglo-Saxon and English Language and Literature at Oxford University.
- Literary Context: The work was originally intended as a single-volume sequel to The Hobbit, but was published in three volumes due to post-war paper shortages.
- Posthumous Contributions: His son, Christopher Tolkien, played a vital role in editing and publishing the broader Middle-earth history, including The Silmarillion.

When asking **who wrote Lord of the Rings**, the simple answer is J.R.R. Tolkien. However, the story behind the creation of this monumental epic is as intricate and fascinating as the history of Middle-earth itself. This masterclass article delves deep into the life of the man who defined modern fantasy, the philological roots of his sub-creation, the intense twelve-year writing process, and the collaborative atmosphere of the Oxford Inklings that helped bring the One Ring into the light of day.

The Life of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien: A Brief Biography

To understand why J.R.R. Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings*, one must first understand his origins. Born on January 3, 1892, in Bloemfontein, South Africa, Tolkien's early childhood was marked by loss and transition. After the death of his father, Arthur, his mother Mabel moved the family back to the West Midlands of England. It was here, in the lush, green landscapes of Sarehole and the industrial grime of Birmingham, that the seeds of the Shire and Mordor were planted. Mabel Tolkien introduced her son to botany and languages, sparking a lifelong passion. When she passed away when Ronald was only twelve, he and his brother Hilary were left in the care of Father Francis Xavier Morgan, a priest who ensured their education and spiritual upbringing.

Academic Brilliance and WWI

Tolkien's intellectual prowess was evident early on. He attended King Edward's School and later Exeter College, Oxford, where he specialized in Philology—the study of languages in written historical sources. However, the shadow of World War I loomed large. In 1916, Tolkien served as a second lieutenant in the Lancashire Fusiliers. He witnessed the horrors of the Battle of the Somme, an experience that would profoundly influence his depictions of the Dead Marshes and the psychological toll of war on his characters. It was during his recovery from "trench fever" that he began writing the earliest sketches of his mythology, what would eventually become *The Silmarillion*.

The Philological Foundation: Language Before Story

Perhaps the most unique aspect of Tolkien's authorship is that he did not set out to write a novel; he set out to create a world for his languages. As a philologist, Tolkien believed that for a language to be truly viable, it required a history and a people to speak it. He famously stated, "The invention of languages is the foundation. The "stories" were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse."

The Elvish Tongues

Before *The Lord of the Rings*was a glimmer in his eye, Tolkien was developing Quenya (inspired by Finnish) and Sindarin (inspired by Welsh). He crafted complex grammars, vocabularies, and phonological histories. To give these languages a home, he constructed the vast history of the Elder Days, involving the Valar, the Elves, and the tragic fall of Gondolin. This deep internal logic is why Middle-earth feels so authentic compared to other fantasy worlds—it has a linguistic bedrock that predates the narrative.

The Evolution of a Sequel: From The Hobbit to The Lord of the Rings

In 1937, Tolkien published *The Hobbit*, which was a surprise critical and commercial success. His publisher, Stanley Unwin of Allen & Unwin, immediately requested a sequel. Tolkien, however, was more interested in finishing his "legendarium" (the myths of the First Age). He initially offered *The Silmarillion*, but the publishers found it too "Celtic" and difficult. Reluctantly, Tolkien began a "new Hobbit" story in December 1937.

A Long-Expected Writing Process

What started as a simple story about Bilbo’s nephew, Bingo Bolger-Baggins (who later became Frodo), rapidly grew into something far darker and more complex. Between 1937 and 1949, Tolkien wrote and rewrote the manuscript, often stalling for months or years at a time. The transition from a children"s story to an epic heroic romance was not seamless. Tolkien wrestled with the identity of the "Black Riders," the nature of the Ring, and the emergence of characters like Strider, who was originally conceived as a hobbit named Trotter who wore wooden shoes.

Feature	The Hobbit (1937)	The Lord of the Rings (1954-1955)
Target Audience	Children / Young Readers	Adults / Serious Literary Readers
Tone	Whimsical and episodic	Epic, somber, and mythological
Core Theme	Personal growth and greed	Sacrifice, power, and mortality
Scope	A single journey to a mountain	A global war for the fate of a world
Drafting Time	Roughly 2-3 years	Over 12 years

The Role of The Inklings: Collaboration and Feedback

Tolkien did not write in a vacuum. He was a central figure in a literary discussion group known as The Inklings. This group, which met at the Eagle and Child pub in Oxford (often called "The Bird and Baby") and in C.S. Lewis's rooms at Magdalen College, provided crucial feedback. Members included C.S. Lewis (author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*), Charles Williams, and Owen Barfield. Tolkien would read chapters of *The Lord of the Rings*aloud to the group. C.S. Lewis, in particular, was an indefatigable supporter, constantly encouraging Tolkien when his perfectionism threatened to halt the project entirely. Without Lewis's prodding, it is highly possible the manuscript would never have been completed.

Themes and Philosophy: What the Author Poured Into the Work

When examining who wrote *The Lord of the Rings*, we must look at the author"s internal world. Tolkien was a devout Roman Catholic, and while he despised direct allegory, he admitted that the work was "fundamentally religious and Catholic." The themes of providence, humility (the small overcoming the great), and the refusal of power are deeply rooted in his faith. Additionally, his love for the English countryside led to a strong environmentalist theme, personified by the Ents and the destruction wrought by Saruman's industrialization of Isengard.

The Rejection of Allegory

Many readers attempt to link the Ring to the atomic bomb or the events of World War II. Tolkien explicitly rejected this, stating in the foreword to the second edition that he preferred "applicability" to "allegory." He wanted the story to be timeless, a "sub-creation" that functioned on its own laws rather than a coded commentary on contemporary politics.

The Publishing Nightmare: Three Parts or One?

By 1949, the "New Hobbit" was finished, but it was massive. Tolkien wanted it published alongside *The Silmarillion*, leading to a dispute with Allen & Unwin. He briefly took the work to Collins, but they balked at the length. Eventually, he returned to Allen & Unwin. Due to the high cost of paper in post-WWII Britain, the publisher decided to split the book into three volumes: *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*. Tolkien initially disliked the title of the third volume, feeling it gave away the ending, but he was eventually overruled. The books were released between July 1954 and October 1955, changing the landscape of literature forever.

Christopher Tolkien: The Steward of Middle-earth

While J.R.R. Tolkien wrote the primary text, the legacy of Middle-earth owes an immeasurable debt to his son, Christopher Tolkien. After his father's death in 1973, Christopher spent decades organizing, editing, and publishing the vast amount of unfinished notes, drafts, and maps. He was the one who finally brought *The Silmarillion* (1977), *Unfinished Tales*, and the twelve-volume *History of Middle-earth* to the public. In many ways, Christopher was the co-architect of the modern reader''s understanding of his father's world.

Methodology: How Tolkien Constructed His World

Tolkien''s process was meticulous. He didn''t just write; he calculated. He spent days ensuring that the phases of the moon in the story matched the timeline of the characters'' travels. He drew detailed maps to ensure that the distances traveled by the Fellowship were geographically consistent. This level of "world-building" (a term largely popularized by his success) created a sense of secondary reality that few authors have ever matched.

The Importance of Maps and Names

Tolkien famously began with a map. He believed that the geography of the world dictated the movements of the characters. Every name in the book—from Aragorn to Zen-something—had an etymological history in his constructed languages. This consistency provides an anchor for the reader, making the impossible feel inevitable.

Common Pitfalls in Understanding Tolkien''s Authorship

1. The "Trilogy" Misconception: People often call The Lord of the Rings a trilogy. Technically, it is a single novel that was simply published in three parts for economic reasons. Tolkien viewed it as a six-book work (two per volume) plus extensive appendices.
2. The Ghostwriter Myth: Unlike modern celebrity authors, Tolkien had no ghostwriters. Every word of the original text was his own, though his son Christopher acted as a literary executor for posthumous works.
3. The Movie Influence: Many believe Peter Jackson or other screenwriters had a hand in the story. While the films are famous, they are adaptations. The original literary genius belongs solely to Tolkien.

Conclusion: The Man Behind the Legend

J.R.R. Tolkien was more than just a fantasy writer; he was a philologist, a veteran, a professor, and a visionary. He wrote *The Lord of the Rings* not for fame, but to satisfy a deep internal need to give his languages a home and his country a mythology it had lost. His ability to blend high-stakes adventure with deep linguistic and philosophical weight is why his work remains the gold standard of the genre. When you read *The Lord of the Rings*, you are not just reading a book; you are entering a lifetime''s work of one of the 20th century''s greatest minds.

Frequently Asked Questions

Tags: #jrr tolkien #lord of the rings #middle-earth #fantasy literature #philology #author biography #the inklings