

## PREFACE

by Aaron Alex Ryan Graves

With the releases of the Oscar-winning cinematic treasures from *New Line Cinemas*, the hype and interest in J.R.R. Tolkien's epic saga has been reinvigorated to such a degree that no movie series ever released will likely match its intensity.

My own interest in *The Lord of the Rings* spans decades. I remember reading *The Hobbit* first in junior high school and being intrigued by it. I remember reading its successor shortly thereafter and being absolutely spellbound. In fact, to be fair, "successor" is a terrible misnomer, and in fact a grievous underestimation of the most captivating fictional masterpiece of all time.

*The Lord of the Rings* reached deep down into my heart and catapulted my imagination into the furthest reaches of Middle-Earth. When I was first given the series in 1989 as a Christmas present, I was simply overjoyed. I could never imagine that an annual pilgrimage of plunging deep into the realm of Tolkien's genius would become my ritual. Instinctively when winter would set in, I would reach once more for the enthralling trilogy on my bookshelf and immerse myself in it yet again. I remember burying my nose in the creases of the book and inhaling deeply the sweet fragrance of knowledge. There was a strangely pungent aroma permeating those books, and it wasn't just ink and paper. It was fantasy. It was imagination. It was *awe* to me.

I would go on to read that epic story every year without fail, and at this writing, I have read the entire trilogy over 100 times. Timeless passages have imprinted themselves in my memory and I often find myself recollecting and employing them in daily life and conversation. When I heard that Peter Jackson and *New Line Cinemas* were finally producing the entire opus in all its majesty and in, deservedly, three individual films, my heart leapt. "Well, it's about time," I thought. And simultaneously I was filled with all kinds of hopes and fears, anticipations and dreads, hoping that the visual deliverance of such a grand *oeuvre* would prove to meet all of my expectations. My brother will attest that prior to the midnight-screening on the day of the release of the first film, I was drooling. And he will also attest that throughout the length and breadth of the film, my jaw was a permanent fixture on the floor. Even at points where I knew where the story would go, such as when Gandalf plunges down the "bottomless" pit under Khazad-dûm after the fiery Balrog (and to his seeming death below), I was seized with emotion. I knew full well Gandalf would not die, yet I honestly shed tears seeing that dramatic scene brought to life so powerfully. In each successive movie, I was brought to tears at some point, realizing the length and breadth the director went to realize Tolkien's visions onscreen. I will never forget the most powerful moment of the saga, when Samwise speaks words of summoned hope to Frodo, and then lifts and carries him up the slopes of Mount Doom. I get chills just thinking about it.

Tolkien's story, long ago, had wrought such immeasurable havoc on my preconceived notions of the standards of quality literature...I was unprepared at least, and blown away at best, for what rich treasures lay in the writing. From the onset of the story at Bilbo Baggins' party to Sam's return to Bag End after the departure at the Grey Havens, I was *enthralled*. It would be impossible for me to sum up how much this entire story means to me: I don't really know what it is. Has each published book been soaked in a vat of magic? Have the stories been so laced with ingenuity as to inflict the conscience with addictive fervor? There is, indeed, *naught*, that can adequately explain what this story means to myself and so many million more readers worldwide. For the Tolkien fan, this is sacred. It is drenched with meaning. It is *real*. It is a tour de force, an awe-inspiring immersion, a belonging to something genuinely nourishing.

Fiction and literature have truly seen more than their fair share of fantasy. It is a genre of author-sing that demands an incredibly expansive sense of imagination and ingenuity. To create a world apart from that which we know is an arduous task that must be undertaken with strict guidelines, adherence to new laws, and an understanding of the necessity of gently introducing the reader into this new world. You cannot simply whisk someone away to a magical land and throw bizarre names and faces at them and expect them to swallow it obediently. It must be grounded in laws, in truth, and somewhat, in reality. Madeline L'Engel, C.S. Lewis and Anne McCaffrey knew this as well as J.R.R. Tolkien did, but Tolkien had a super-advantage of linguistics and history studies. The characters, the tongues, the names...all of them stemmed from a love of languages, in particular, and Tolkien ground this heritage into his creations with passion – whether the languages were old Norse, Tengwar, Daeron, Quenya or Sindarin – he made them all grounded in *reality*. One of the prime reasons

why *The Lord of the Rings* is so incredibly sacred to me, (and, I'll wager, to others) is that it *feels* real. It makes complete sense. It's not a temporary spell cast over you – you close the last few pages of the book (when you do finally get there – the journey is of a pleasurable long duration!) and feel part of something wonderfully tangible that stays with you for the long haul.

There is, actually, nothing “fantasy” about *The Lord of the Rings*. I found myself believing that it actually existed, somewhere, sometime. I was not so much saturated by its imaginative scope as I was convinced of its literal presence in the pages of history. Gandalf could have been one of my great ancestors, for all I cared: all I wanted was to read it, shake my head in awe, and turn back to page one and start again. And I have done so for many years now. There is nothing else that has even touched the depth of his work, slaved over for several decades with true grit and passion. I will offend many when I say that *Harry Potter* is a cheap rip-off. In fact, all works of fantasy, if you really look close, tip their hat in one way or another to Tolkien's genius.

If this is your first time partaking of this epic tale, I invite you to separate, at the onset, what you have known about fact and fiction. Imagine for a moment that you could go back through a time portal to the same earthly plain that we live on today. I remain absolutely stalwart in my assertion that if you pinpoint your coordinates and time-plotting correctly, you will set yourself down in Bag End...or at the pinnacle of Orthanc...or by the dark, sad waters of Lake Nurnen in Mordor. You will converse with hobbits, orcs, the Dark Lord, elves and wizards. Your heart will tremble at the *doom-doom* in the vast caverns of Moria, beat with adrenaline as you fly on the back of Gwaihir the Windlord, and leap with joy at the crowning of Aragorn.

No matter who you are, where you are, *what* you are...Middle-Earth will hook you - I guarantee it. It hooked me, and I have devoted the recent few years of my life to melding some of Tolkien's “lost” passages into his original work. Along with this, I have painfully and cautiously integrated my own residential perspective of Middle-Earth in various other passages that I felt belonged. An avid and die-hard “re-“ reader of *LOTR* will notice and hopefully appreciate them from the get-go. Let me also express from the onset that these added passages of my own are in no way intended as “corrective”, replacement, or stemming from a notion that “he should have done it this way.” On the contrary, Tolkien himself expressed in his forenote that there were some errors that were glossed over (which I have fixed, as per his desire, I'll wager). Some of these errors were pointed out by his son Christopher Tolkien in his excellent biographical works like *The Treason of Isengard* and *The War of the Ring*. Tolkien's son paid close attention to his father's notes, painstakingly researching the behind-the-scenes sculpture of *LOTR*. If there are as many true “ringsgeeks” out there as I believe there to be, most of them will catch the changes rather fluidly. However I am not omniscient or flawless by any stretch of the imagination; doubtless there will inevitably remain some minor errors that hopefully do not confuse or distract. When I found the unedited text of all three books available online and began this journey, it was, by no means, precision at the outset. I undertook therefore to correct a plethora of typos and grammatical errors, but doubtless have not tackled every single one.

In terms of additions, they have emanated only from a profound love of this work, in which I deeply desired to be a participant. I desired to take my own little time-travel and join Tolkien at creation. To be part of something so infinitely wondrous was probably never my right: however Tolkien dared me to be daring, and to stretch my imagination.

I decided to take him up on that challenge.

It was quite practical, really. For example, there is an invaluable piece of history in the chapter “The Quest of Erebor” (from Tolkien's book, *Unfinished Tales*) that involves Gandalf's summary of events preceding the adventure of Bilbo Baggins that patently factored into the steps leading up to the War of the Ring. I simply incorporated this as a “hindsight is 20-20” perspective in *The Return of the King*, Book Six, Chapter VI, “The Designs of Wizardry.” I have found this piece of the grand puzzle to be indispensable in my assembly. I subsequently could not then subtract Samwise's storytelling account as recaptured by Christopher Tolkien, from the last chapter of the trilogy, “The Grey Havens.” It is such a beautiful segment of a continuing story; I restored it after Sam's return home.

There are also punctuations of comedy that Tolkien inserted and then withdrew. Christopher Tolkien recaptured them, and I inserted them. By no means is *The Lord of the Rings* a lighthearted tale of comedy – it is dark and mysterious, lighthearted and obvious at the same time. It is this melancholy mix that makes the story so well-rounded. However, re-importing these rare points of humor, such as Gandalf's quip back to Legolas on the slopes of Caradhras, were, I felt, complimentary to Tolkien's vision.

Aside from that, I created narratives which serve as a follow-up to some Tolkien references made at earlier

points, which he never revisited. I simply hammered out scenes, much I felt as Tolkien would have: scenes that compliment and do not distract. Scenes that provide a more rounded picture of the saga and that bring to conclusion prior said references. Faramir's talk with Frodo after the war of the ring ("laughing at old grief") and Gandalf's and Aragorn's meeting with Faramir (explaining Denethor's fall) are prime examples of these. Additionally, Gandalf's conversation with Frodo about Gwaihir after the Council of Elrond served to eliminate a recurring question I've heard as to simplifying the mission to eradicate the ring. I wanted to help eliminate the path of least resistance and further explain why the journey of secrecy was so necessary. All in all, I yearned to be part of Tolkien's vision of creation. That, in short, is what he does: he spawns genius. And while my short interjections will fall dreadfully short of Tolkien's brilliance, they are intended more as a form of partnership in something wonderful. That was my sole aim in this endeavor. Doubtless, the purists who consider themselves as inexorably allegiant will not be able to divorce themselves from the original work as they were most likely unable to do with some of Peter Jackson's deviations in movie form. I am not asking them to do so, and they should feel free to dispute my contributions. For that I commend them. However I can assure anyone who picks up this, my collection, that it is because of a mutual appreciation for the sacredness of the original text that I treated this project reverently and carefully. All in all, my compositions represent but a minute fraction of the mammoth of beautiful narrative, and do not appear, to me, to be intrusive (speaking as objectively as possible).

I have at diverse times attempted to structure out a continuing story that carries forward the ending of this trilogy. However, I have painfully discovered that such a project is simply beyond me. My literary and creative prowess, as complimented as they may have been, are simply overmatched by J.R.R. Tolkien. I have therefore attempted to unite my creativity with his through this very heartfelt project, which has truly been a labour of love. Not to imply any sort of spiritual "habitation," but in a way, since his passing in 1973, I have always thought, "what if just a little bit of his spirit passed into me?" (since that was my birth year). I have always felt a kinship with the dreams, vision and fantasy he bequeathed to us through *The Lord of the Rings*. As I could not seem to create a continuation, I resorted to merging some of my own ideas into his story, with the intention of being a loyal part of his dream, not interrupting it.

This edition coming 50 years precisely since his passing, I dedicate this to John Ronald Reuel Tolkien.

If I could demand that everyone on earth read two things, I would demand that first, they read the Bible. There is richness, hope, joy, grace and truth, above all else, there. There is *absolute*, indefatigable, and unarguable reality there: the history of God's interaction with mankind, the beautiful gospels of Jesus Christ Almighty, our Lord and Savior, and the accounts of lives transformed by His grace, are essential to growing, learning, maturing, and attaining to the whole measure of righteousness. Supplemental to all of this, there exist a plethora of rich works written by inspired authors the world over. One of those was J.R.R. Tolkien. I would secondly demand that all would read this trilogy and come to know the joys of beautiful literature, hope, victory and maturation through trials. It is a heavy tale of defeat and victory, joy and sadness, love and loss, death and rebirth...and although Tolkien himself states that he disliked allegory, you will no doubt find plentiful references to biblical truths therein. It is, next to the Bible, the most beautiful thing I have ever read...and then re-read a hundred times again. It is my prayer that this beautiful story would captivate and inspire you as it has done me.

Those who have enjoyed the recent series from *New Line Cinemas* as much as I have will also enjoy the pictures captured from various scenes interspersed through the movies (captured and included from public domain), now embedded in each of the three books. All in all, may this newest release of a timeless classic continue to amaze and inspire you to no end, and hopefully, Tolkien's vision will not be impeded or impaired by mine. For my part I strove to articulate just how much this marvelous author and wondrous story mean to me. It is certainly not the Bible, the most sacred and real work of all, but it is nonetheless deeply sacred and real to many.

May you, the reader, feel it as deeply as I have, for many years to come.

Sincerely,



Ryan Graves



GRAVES