



## J.R.R. Tolkien: A Life Inspired

By Wyatt North

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John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was Professor of Anglo-Saxon (Old English) at the University of Oxford. His research on Beowulf is still considered a standard in the field. Tolkien, however, unlike most Oxford dons, stepped out of his role as professor to create popular literature. Tolkien's best-known writings were *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, in which he created a fully realized world known as Middle-earth, vaguely identifiable as Northern Europe in a pre-history that never was. To bring his world to life, he produced detailed geography and cartography as well as a legendary background. He peopled the world with diverse types of inhabitants and created spoken and written languages for them. By doing this, he essentially created modern fantasy literature and a standard for subsequent writers to chase and miss. A British poll at the end of the twentieth century named *The Lord of the Rings* the most important English-language work of that century. During his lifetime, Tolkien did not appreciate people focusing on him rather than on his writings. He felt that his writings were more worthy of attention. With apologies to the late gentleman, he is now due some notice.

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