The Biography of J.R.R. Tolkien

J.R.R. Tolkien was born in 1892, Bloomfontein, South Africa. After three years in South Africa, he returned to England with his Mother Mabel; unfortunately his father died one year later, leaving him with little memory of his father. His early childhood was, by all accounts, a happy one; he was brought up in the Warwickshire countryside (many regard this idealised upbringing as the basis for the Shire in Lord of the Rings).

In 1904, when John was just 12, his mother Mabel died from diabetes leaving a profound mark on him and his brother. After his mother’s passing, he was brought up by the family’s Catholic priest, Father Francis Morgen. From an early age, J.R.R. Tolkien was an excellent scholar, with an unusually specialised interest in languages. He enjoyed studying languages especially Greek, Anglo Saxon, and later at Oxford, Finnish.

Although a scholar at King Edward VI school, he initially failed to win a scholarship to Oxford. This was partly due to falling in love with his childhood sweetheart Edith. On finding out of this romance, his guardian, Father Francis Morgan, prohibited John from seeing Edith until he was 21 and no longer under his care. Father Morgen, made John promise not to see Edith, and John reluctantly
agreed to his request. John faithfully waited until his 21st birthday, and on this date he renewed his contact with Edith, and successfully persuaded her to marry him. It is a testament to his belief in faithfulness and honesty, that he was willing to wait several years to meet his wife; such sentiments of nobility appear frequently in his writings; for example, the magnificent love story of Beren and Luthien.

**J.R.R. Tolkien in Oxford**

From an academic point of view, his separation from Edith seemed to do the trick, and a year later he won an exhibition to Exeter College, Oxford where he would study classics. John did not particularly shine in this subject and grew to enjoy the pleasures of University life, though his meagre income made it difficult to keep up with the spending habits of more affluent students. Uninspired by the classics, John was able to switch to his real love English literature. He was a competent scholar, but a lot of his time was spent researching other languages in the Bodleian library. It was here in Oxford that he became fascinated with Finnish, a language which would form the basis for Quenya; a language he would later give to his Elves. His love of languages remained with Tolkien throughout his life; in particular, he began developing his own languages, a remarkable undertaking. In fact, in later commented that languages lied at the heart of his writings; the Silmarillion and Lord of the Rings. He actually said, the stories existed to provide an opportunity
to use the languages. Devotees of the book may not agree, but it does illustrate the profound importance he attached to the use of languages.

**J.R.R. Tolkien First World War**

At the outbreak of the First World War, J.R.R. Tolkien decided to finish off his degree before enlisting in 1916. Joining the Lancashire fusiliers, he made it to the Western Front just before the great Somme offensive. At first hand, J.R.R. Tolkien witnessed the horrors and carnage of the “Great War”; he lost many close friends, tellingly he remarked “By 1918 all but one of my close friends were dead”. J.R.R. Tolkien survived, mainly due to the persistent reoccurrence of trench fever, which saw him invalided back to England. He rarely talked about his experiences directly, but the large-scale horrors of war, will undoubtedly have influenced his writings in some way. Perhaps the imagery for the wastelands of Mordor may have had birth in the muddy horrors of the Western Front.

It was back in England, in 1917, that J.R.R Tolkien began working on his epic - "The Silmarillion". The Silmarillion, lies at the heart of all Tolkien’s mythology, it is a work he continually revised, until his death in 1973. The Silmarillion makes hard reading, in that, it is not plot driven, but depicts the history of a universe, through an almost biblical overview. It moves from the Creation of the Universe, to the introduction of evil and the rebellion of the Noldor. It is in the Silmarillion that many roots from the Lord of the Rings stem. It gives the Lord of the Rings the impression of a real epic. It becomes not just a story, but also the history of an entire world and peoples.

**Writing the Hobbit**
Initially J.R.R Tolkien’s writings on the Silmarillion were known by very few. He found his time absorbed in teaching and other duties of being a professor. He also found time to write important papers on medieval literature. These included seminal works on, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and Beowulf. In 1945, he was given the Merton professorship, and gained additional duties of teaching and lecturing.

It was sometime after 1930 that Tolkien gained an unexpected inspiration to start writing the Hobbit. It was whilst marking an examination paper, that he jotted in the margins of a paper the immortal words “In a hole in the ground lived a hobbit.” Unlike the Silmarillion, the Hobbit was a simple fairy tale and adventure for children. Hinting at evil things, it still ends in a happy ending for all and is primarily concerned with a triumph of good over evil. In the course of the next few years, friends including C.S. Lewis, read his manuscript and gave good reviews. In the course of time the publisher, Allen and Unwin, got to read it; with a glowing reference from, Rayner Unwin, the 10 year old son of Mr Unwin; the book was published to commercial success.

**J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis**

J.R.R. Tolkien was good friends with C.S. Lewis and together they were key members of the 'Inklings' an informal Oxford literary club, where writers met together to read out poetry and short stories. Tolkien had a strong Catholic faith throughout his life; he often discussed religion with C.S.Lewis. Lewis later said that his conversations with Tolkien were a key factor in his decision to embrace
Christianity. However, their relationship cooled over the years. There was a little friction over C.S.Lewis relationship with Joy Davidson, but they remained firm friends and C.S.Lewis was always a stout literary defender of Tolkien's work. (Though Tolkien was somewhat less enthusiastic about the work of C.S.Lewis.)

**Lord of the Rings**

Due to the success of The Hobbit, Allen and Unwin, encouraged J.R.R. Tolkien to write a sequel. Thus over a period of many years, J.R.R. Tolkien began writing the Lord of the Rings. This soon became quite different to the hobbit, both in scope and dimension. Putting its roots into the Silmarillion, it became an epic of unprecedented depth. No longer was Tolkien writing a simplistic adventure story; the triumph of good over evil is no longer so complete. Even in the mission’s success there is no obvious happy ending. There is a feeling of permanent change; nothing can remain as it is. As well as being a fascinating story line, the book deals with many issues of how people respond to certain choices and the influence of power and ego. It can be read in many ways, but it does offer an underlying moral and spiritual dimension, which is inherent in the development of the story.

Due to the sheer scope and length of the book, the publishers Allen and Unwin, were wary of publication. They worried about whether it would be a commercial success. Eventually they decided to publish the book, but split it up into six sections; they also offered no payment to J.R.R Tolkien, until the book moved into profit. The first edition was published in 1954, and soon became a good seller. However, it was in 1965 when the book was published in America,
that it really took off becoming an international bestseller. Somehow the book managed to capture the mood of the 1960s counter culture, and it became immensely popular on American campuses. Tolkien, became a household name, and Lord of the Rings would soon become renowned as the most popular book of all time.

Although the book has received the most powerful popular acclaim, it has not always received the same commendation from the literary world. In 1972, Oxford University conferred on Tolkien the honorary degree of, Doctor of Letters. This was not for his writing, but his researches on linguistic studies. Tolkien, however, would have taken no offence at this award. For him his linguistic studies were as important if not more so than his fictional literary endeavours.

He did not particularly enjoy the fame that came from his literary success, and in 1968 he moved to Poole to gain a little more privacy. His beloved wife, Edith, died in 1971, and J.R.R. Tolkien died a couple of years later in 1973. After his death his creations gained increased popularity and sales. Even before the release of the Lord of the Rings films, the book, "Lord of the Rings" was often voted as best loved book of all time. His son, Christopher Tolkien, carefully went through all his manuscripts, and published posthumously several histories of middle earth, encompassing various early drafts of stories and histories.

The Summary of the Novel

The Hobbit is considered to be one of the best books written by J.R.R. Tolkien. Created in the tradition of a fairy tale, with author's effort to integrate
two interests, stories for his three sons and a mythology of England, the book has had a corner in hearts of many readers since it was first published in September, 1937. Being Tolkien's first published work, "The Hobbit" is often marketed as a prelude to his masterpiece "The Lord of the Rings", published 17 years later.

The book's plot and characters reflect the author's thoughts about the complexity of human being combined with the ideas of Scandinavian epics he studied and the echo of middle class England in which Tolkien lived. His main hero, Bilbo Baggins (the "Hobbit" of the title), represents the pattern of a rural Englishman of that time. The novel's unicity and sophisticated humor lie in transplanting a typical representative of English society of the 1930s into a medieval hero. In many ways, "The Hobbit" can be marketed both as an introduction in the fantasy world of Middle-earth and as a link between the events, taking place in "The Silmarillion" and "The Lord of the Rings".

Bilbo Baggins lives his calm and peaceful life in a comfortable hole, some may compare to quaint OC apartments, near the bustling hobbit village of Hobbiton, smoking a pipe, drinking good bear and looking for a meal. His life style and interests are typical for hobbits - small and chubby people about half the size of humans who usually dress in bright colors and wear no shoes, because their large feet grow thick brown hair, and feel great love to good food and drink. In the beginning of the story Bilbo has a very weak character; his main features are shyness and fear susceptibility. Like most of his kind, he is fond of gardening and doesn't wish any excitement or adventure.
One day the situation is changed by the arrival of a mysterious old wizard Gandalf who is looking for someone to join him and a group of thirteen militant dwarves on their quest to reclaim the treasure stolen by Smaug, the most awful dragon in all Middle-earth. In this dangerous adventure Bilbo Baggins is intended to be an active participant, although, the dwarves are very skeptical about Gandalf's choice and the hobbit is scared.

After the heroes begin their journey, all of them, except Gandalf, are caught by three hungry trolls who plan to eat them. But Gandalf appears and initiates a quarrel between the trolls, so they stay outside, until the sun rises and the sunlight turns them to stone. With a key found by Bilbo the group unlocks trolls' secret cave, takes magic swords and travels to the place called Rivendell, where the heroes have a rest at home of Elrond, a friendly elf leader.

Lord Elrond translates the inscriptions written on the swords that Thorin Oakenshield, a king of dwarves, and Gandalf found in trolls' cave, and the group sets out to cross the Misty Mountains. Soon a terrible snowstorm begins, so the heroes find their shelter in a cave (that turns out to be the Great Goblin's cave), where all of them, except Gandalf, are captured by goblins. But Gandalf appears, kills the Great Goblin, using Glamdring, a magic sword, and frees his friends. Trying to escape, the group accidentally leaves behind Bilbo who falls on his way out and loses consciousness.

Roaming about the tunnels, Bilbo finds an unusual golden ring and puts it into his pocket. Shortly, after he faces Gollum, an ugly and hissing creature who lives in caverns and hunts fish and goblins. Gollum wants to kill Bilbo, but Bilbo
wins the fight and realizes that the ring is magic and is Gollum's favorite possession. He puts the ring on and becomes invisible. Bilbo finds a short way leading up out of the goblins' tunnels and meets Gandalf and the dwarves who have already escaped. The group travels further, but the giant wolves, known as Wargs, pursue them, and they have to climb up trees to survive. The situation gets worse when goblins come, but luckily Bilbo and his comrades are rescued by a group of great eagles who fly them to their safety nest.

Next morning Gandalf takes his companions to the house of Beorn, a creature who can metamorphose from a man into a bear, and he helps the travelers to outfit for the next step of their journey through the forest of Mirkwood. At the edge of this dark and dangerous forest Gandalf leaves Bilbo and the dwarves, warning them not to turn off the path. On their way through Mirkwood the travelers use a boat to cross a bewitched lake and rescue Bompur, one of the thirteen dwarves, from a magic power of the lake which sends to sleep everyone who falls into its water. Time goes by, provision ends, and the group decides to ignore Gandalf's advice and leaves the path. They are captured by giant spiders, but Bilbo frees himself and kills a giant spider with the sword found in the trolls' cave, he names it Sting. With the help of the ring Bilbo becomes invisible, frees the dwarves from the spider's webs and reveals a secret of the magic ring. Shortly after the fight with spiders, the group, except Bilbo, is caught by the wood elves living near the river which runs through the forest. Bilbo spends weeks, wandering around the palace of the Elvenking and thinking over a plan to free his companions. Using the ring, Bilbo helps the dwarves to slink away from the elves;
he hides them in empty wine barrels and floats down the river to Esgaroth or Lake-town, a human town near the Lonely Mountain, where the dragon lives.

Spending a week in Esgaroth, the group goes to the Lonely Mountain and sees the door to Smaug's den, but they can't open it until Bilbo discovers the clue in Thorin's map and uses the key of Thorin's grandfather. Hand over head Bilbo talks to the awful dragon Smaug who unwittingly coughs up that despite the impenetrable scales has a weak spot near his heart. The dragon gets into a rage, when Bilbo escapes with the precious gem, the Arkenstone, stolen from the hoard, and leaves the mountain to burn Esgaroth. Smaug destroys the town before he is killed by Bard, a heroic archer, informed about the dragon's weak point from a message delivered by a thrush.

With the dragon dead, the humans of Lake Town and the elves of Mirkwood turn steps to the Lonely Mountain in search of the treasure as compensation for their losses, but Thorin refuses to ally, and Bilbo gives Bard the Arkenstone to use it in negotiation with the leader of the dwarves. When Thorin knows about Bilbo's deed, he becomes very angry, but Gandalf appears and safes the hobbit from the dwarf's blind fury. At this time, an army of Wargs and goblins approaches the mountain, so the humans, elves and dwarves have to unite, and The Battle of Five Armies begins. The heroes nearly lose, but Beorn and the eagles arrive and help them win the battle. Thorin is hurt and before he dies he expresses regrets for his actions against Bilbo; the leader of the dwarves is buried with the Arkenstone and Orcrist.
After this dangerous journey, Bilbo and Gandalf come back to Hobbiton, where the Hobbit continues to live. Despite Bilbo is rejected by hospitable hobbit society, he is happy to communicate with elves and wizards and enjoys his simple and comfortable life.

The storyteller of "The Hobbit" is Bilbo who narrates about the actions he takes part in, the thoughts he has and feelings he experiences. At the very beginning Bilbo appears as a weak and timid hobbit, but his personality develops getting over the difficulties he meets over a period of the journey, and at the end of the story we see a hero with the strongest character. He is not confused to express his own ideas and learns to overcome his fears. The author describes the changes in Bilbo's character very carefully as much as to tell us: don't let your fears be obstacles in your path.