



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on September 21, 2012

Seventy-Five Years Later, The Hobbit Still Enchants Us

Seventy-five years ago, on September 21, 1937, the world received *The Hobbit* or *There and Back Again*, a strong and sweet message from one of the greatest Christian apologists in modern history, J.R.R. Tolkien. Much of the reason for the book's success is obvious: Tolkien was a fabulous writer; he was describing a mystical, but earthy world which preceded the rise of man; and the characters were drawn with a master's touch of personality. *The Hobbit* has lost none of its allure over the last 75 years and it has been continuously in print since then.



In fact, *The Hobbit* is the [third best-selling work of fiction in history](#), with 100 million copies sold, and the number two selling book of fiction is *The Lord of the Rings*, sequel to *The Hobbit*, which has sold 150 million copies. Only Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* has sold more copies (and it less than *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* together). Anyone familiar with the hype surrounding the new film *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, after the enormously successful films of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy can attest that Tolkien's Middle Earth has lost none of its appeal to readers.

In a world besieged by scientism, J.R.R. Tolkien gave us metaphorical fantasy of inimitable quality. As Stalin was finishing his purges and the liquidation of the kulak class, with all the millions murdered in that wicked cause, as Hitler was pushing Jews into tinier ghettos and planning their ultimate extermination, as the Japanese were approaching that apex of human devilishness in the Rape of Nanking, Tolkien gave us a wonderfully drawn world in which good creatures fight creatures of the greatest evil.

Tolkien, like his good friend C.S. Lewis, was something of an embarrassment to the snobbish academic class of Britain. (C.S. Lewis' fantasy book *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* is ranked sixth in all time fiction best sellers, and the *Narnia* series of films shows that Lewis, like Tolkien, many decades ago touched something which people today yearn to find.)

When Tolkien's first book, *The Hobbit*, was published, atheism, or at least blasé agnosticism, was deemed the only faith that smart and educated people could hold. Lewis, whose *Mere Christianity* may be the most accessible theology for Christians in the last century, also wrote science fiction: *That Hideous Strength*, the final book of his "space trilogy," predates George Orwell's *1984* and in many ways is superior to it (Lewis, unlike Orwell, grasped that the moral conflict on earth was grounded in theological issues and also illustrated this in the *Narnia* series).

But it was *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy which have wholly captivated the modern West. As in Lewis' fantasies, Tolkien never mentions Christ or even God, but the message is still quite clear: We must oppose evil, with humility because of our many frailties, but with courage even though in our battles here we all end up dying. The lure of power, the lust of self, and all the temptations which can drag us from salvation, are the real enemies in our lives.

The year in which *The Hobbit* was published, 1937, was not just the year in which the horror of statism



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was becoming the grim reality in every newspaper, but also the time in which faith in “Progress,” which often meant the “improvement” of man, through the eugenics ideas of people such as Margaret Sanger and the “cure” for poverty proposed by Franklin Roosevelt and his “Brain Trust,” were persuading more and more people that if God was not dead, He was at least irrelevant. Moreover, science was quickly unraveling every mystery of existence.

In the totalitarian world of Nazism and Bolshevism, science had, indeed, become God. Nazi Party Secretary Martin Bormann instructed party members that Christianity was unscientific, unlike National Socialism.

Those who really knew how weird the “Uncertainty Principle” was also knew that much of reality would forever remain beyond the reach of our pitiable science. Those who were seeing more, not less, complexity in life also knew that Darwinian evolution through only the dead mechanism of natural selection was much more fanciful than anything Tolkien or Lewis wrote. In a time when every haughty voice of militant atheism pretends that science did not arise from the minds of religiously serious men like Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Napier, Pascal, Kelvin, Newton, and Maxwell, it is vital that men recall what C. S. Lewis once described as “satanic blindness.” Science, stripped of religious faith, is a dead end and, in fact, it descends into the antithesis of true science.

In an age in which serious Christian faith was an embarrassment among the academic establishment, Tolkien and Lewis and their fiction laid to rest the notion that somehow Christianity was sterile and dull. In fact, it was the course of evil — of rebellion against our blessed Creator — which led inevitably to blindness and to idiocy. This did not mean just the pathetic Gollum, who forgot his own name and even his separate identity as the lust for power seduced his soul to hopelessness, but even terrifying overlords of evil such as Sauron (the necromancer from *The Hobbit*), whose cunning and power are ever crimped by his inability to understand goodness and whose final, self-determined fate, is nothing less than damnation.

The atheist totalitarians and the smug secular progressives in the West perceived that the world was awful, but they judged that this was the result of too little “social justice.” Tolkien and Lewis presented a wholly different source of evil in the world: rejection of a loving God. Tolkien, a skilled Christian apologist, need not talk about God, Christ or even the Devil directly in his fiction. Instead Tolkien relied upon his vast academic background in languages, especially Norse runes, to create a world unlike anything man had seen. Readers sensed, among all the beauty of his language and the haunting quality of the worlds he describes, something very different from the stark, ideological materialism which has stalked the modern world. When all the clever and chic writers of today have faded into literary dust, *The Hobbit* will still be very much alive.



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