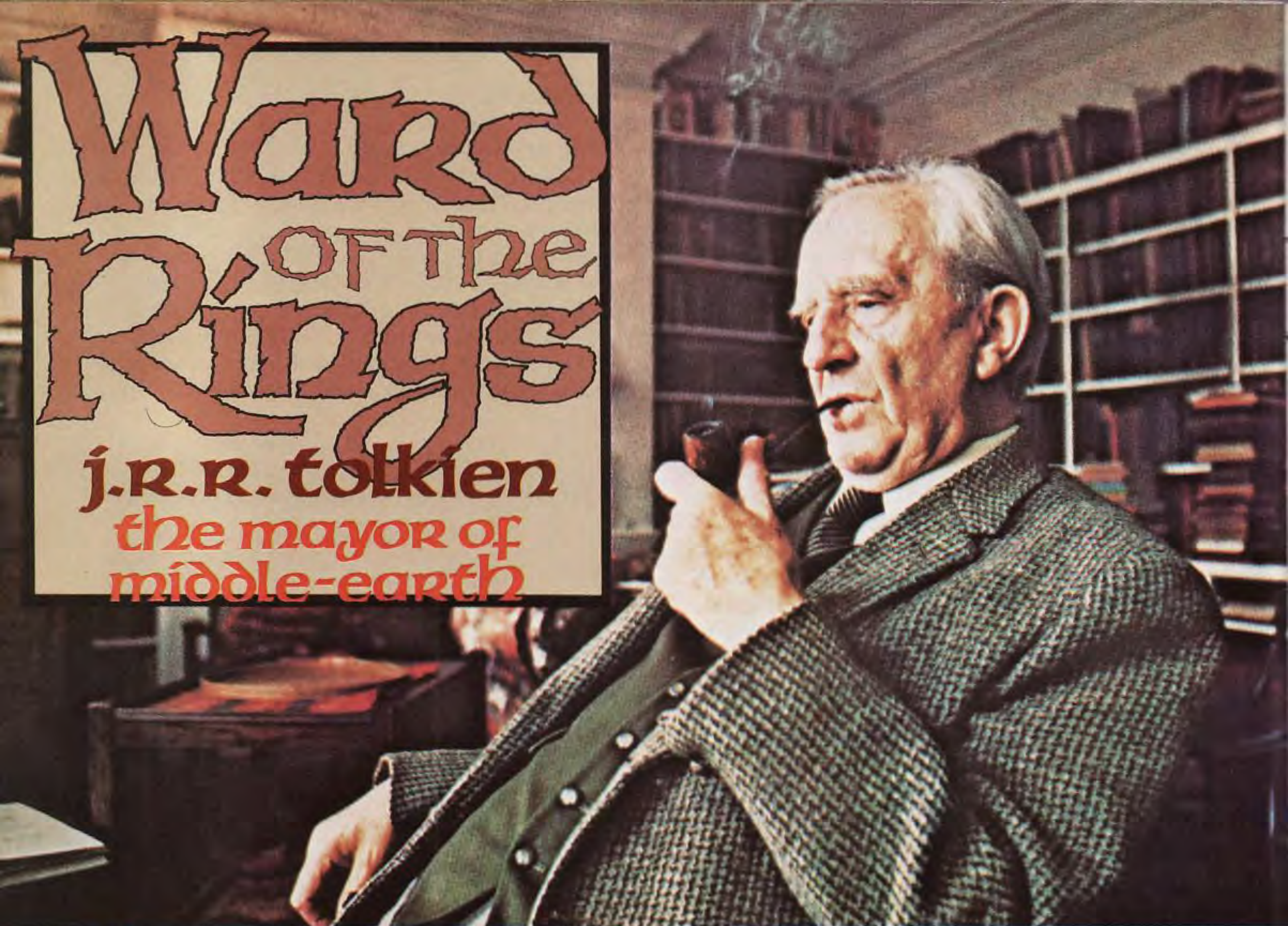


Ward of the Rings

J.R.R. Tolkien
the mayor of
middle-earth



He was born in 1892, on January 3rd, in South Africa, in the capital of the Orange Free State, Bloemfontien.

In a Bournemouth hospital in England, of pneumonia aggravated by a stomach ulcer, he died on September 2nd, 1973.

Ironically, less than a week before his death he had remarked to his last servant, "I feel on top of the world!" And, indeed, at eighty-one, he was.

He had created a legend for his time and become a legend in his time.

The gestation period of his chef d'oeuvre, "The Lord of the Rings", was twelve years. In his biography of Tolkien, "Architect of Middle-earth", Daniel Grotta observes that it is impossible to estimate how many people have read the work since it was published, "but it seems safe to say that the trilogy is among the most

popular works of fiction written during this century. Even today, more than twenty years after publication, it continues to sell extraordinarily well, and is bound to attract still more admirers as it becomes available in other languages.

"The work has inspired ballets, operas, and musical suites; scholarly analyses and criticism; would-be imitators and continuers of hobbit tales; serious attempts to expand and popularize the Elvish languages; Tolkien societies, clubs, and magazines; untold thousands of sketches, drawings, and paintings of Middle-earth characters and scenes; and at least fifteen published books on Tolkien and his mythology."

John.

Ronald
Reuel.

... Tolkien, was his full name.

Pronounced: Toll-key-en.

Germanic in origin, roughly meaning an individual characterized by a propensity for acting courageously first and considering the rashness of the act afterward; someone accepting a challenge with little reckoning for the possibly unfelicitous consequences.

In perhaps an unflattering word, "foolhardy".

Such as, relatively late in life, commencing to compose a literary odyssey longer than "War and Peace", bound to be a publishing disaster (if indeed a publisher "tolkien enough"—i.e., foolhardy enough—to publish it could be found). The London Sunday Times magazine characterized it as a book for the adult market, at an adult price, which continued the story of "The Hobbit", which was a children's book; running to three volumes, with five learned appendices, containing stretches of verse and samples of imaginary lan-

guages in imaginary alphabets; and, a damning feature, with only the most slender thread of a "romantic interest".

Rayner and Sir Stanley Unwin are names that shall live in fame for it was this son-father pair who risked financial loss on the professor's meisterwerk. When Rayner, the son, first read the manuscript, he considered it a brilliant gem, but his business acumen cautioned him that the publication of the volume could very easily result in financial failure.

Rayner was not authorized to take a risk on behalf of the company of the monetary magnitude involved, so he cabled his father, who was abroad at the time.

To Sir Stanley's eternal credit he cabled back a reply that should be preserved in the Museum of Imaginative Literature:

**IF YOU THINK IT A WORK
OF GENIUS THEN YOU MAY
LOSE £1000**

3,500 copies of "The Fellowship of the Ring" would be printed in 1954.

3,250 copies of "The Two Towers" would constitute the edition in 1955.

3,000 of "The Return of the King" would be published in 1956.

Instead, history records that, after the unanticipated sales of the first book, the second and third volumes were released the following year—and in greater rather than diminished quantities.

Middle-earth had been given birth and the burgeoning of a legend would astound the world in the lustrums and decades to come.

It's a pity that fame brought this essentially private man such an invasion of his privacy.

The public descended on him like a plague of Orcs.

His correspondence became a mailstorm when letters from all over the world began arriving at the rate of approximately a thousand a month, with requests—sometimes insensitive

demands—that were impossible to comply with.

There are a million things that could be said about J.R.R. Tolkien (his third given name, Reuel, means "God's friend" in ancient Hebrew . . . he was an arachnidophobe—spider-fearer—from an early age . . . before he was ten he had invented several languages . . . etc., etc.) and most of them are contained in the books by Humphrey Carpenter and Daniel Grotta.

Carpenter reports in part:

"He is slightly less than the average height—not much, but just enough to be noticeable.



**J.R.R. Tolkien
Lord of the Imagination.**

"Much of the time he does not speak clearly.

"Words come out in eager rushes.

"Whole phrases are elided or compressed in the haste of emphasis.

"Often his hand comes up and grasps his mouth, which makes it even harder to hear him.

"He jams his pipe between his teeth, speaks on through clenched jaws.

"His clothes are a little rumpled, but they sit well on him, and though he is in his seventy-sixth year there is only a suggestion of tubbiness behind the buttons of his coloured waistcoat."

How to account for the enduring popularity of The Lord of the Rings? The good doctor's own son Michael of-

fers an educated opinion:

"To me at least, there is nothing mysterious behind the scale and extent of the appeal of my father's writing; his genius has simply answered the call of people of any age or temperament most wearied by the ugliness, the speed, the shoddy values, the slick philosophies which have been given them as dreary substitutions for the beauty, the sense of mystery, excitement, adventure, heroism and joy without which the very soul of man begins to wither and die within him."

As the early Lord of Fantasy (Abraham Merritt) before him, Tolkien enchanted with his word wizardry.

He lead us by the hand and heart back to the childhood innocence of Peter Pan and Wendy, of good overcoming evil.

He inspired an elemental folk-courage that conquered fear.

He bequeathed us the vivid miracle of his fantasies.

He constructed a Yellow Brick Road, Alternate Route, to a Middle-earth far removed from Edgar Rice Burroughs' creation of Pellucidar or L. Frank Baum's Oz, but as surprising and exciting in its own endearing way.

He dark-dreamed of phantom forms and netherworld haunts; harnessed his nightmares, then led them through prickly pastures.

He opened the door to his dreams and made us privy to their breathtaking beauty.

He shone his light on shining realms . . .

Minted fresh myths . . .

Unlocked the lure and lore of legends that will live forever in the heart of humanity.

He gave us the words, and the words were good, and rich, and ripe, and warm, and fecund; and, seedlike, they became rooted in the soil of the soul, the spirit of imagination.

And flowered forth.

J.R.R. Tolkien, English don, Middle-earth magus, left a magnificent treasure to the entire human race.