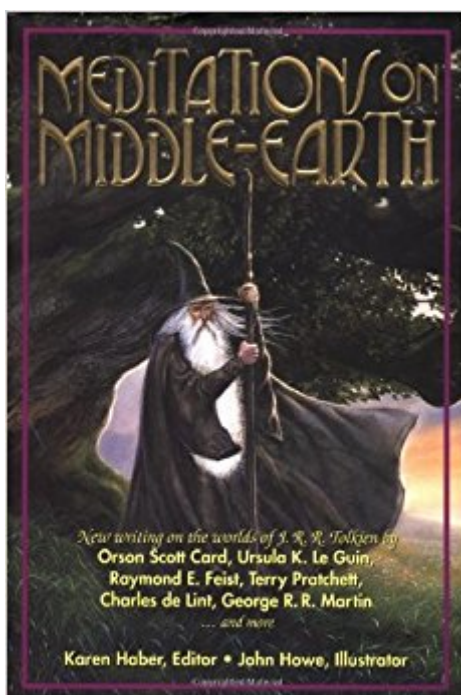


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Meditations On Middle-Earth: New Writing On The Worlds Of J. R. R. Tolkien By Orson Scott Card, Ursula K. Le Guin, Raymond E. Feist, Terry Pratchett, Charles De Lint, George R. R. Martin, And More



Synopsis

NOMINATED FOR THE 2002 HUGO AND LOCUS AWARD When J.R.R. Tolkien created the extraordinary world of Middle-earth and populated it with fantastic, archetypal denizens, reinventing the heroic quest, the world hardly noticed. Sales of *The Lord of the Rings* languished for the better part of two decades, until the Ballantine editions were published here in America. By late 1950s, however, the books were selling well and beginning to change the face of fantasy. . . . forever. A generation of students and aspiring writers had their hearts and imaginations captured by the rich tapestry of the Middle-earth mythos, the larger-than-life heroic characters, the extraordinary and exquisite nature of Tolkien's prose, and the unending quest to balance evil with good. These young readers grew up to become the successful writers of modern fantasy. They created their own worlds and universes, in some cases their own languages, and their own epic heroic quests. And all of them owe a debt of gratitude to the works and the author who first set them on the path. In *Meditations on Middle-earth*, sixteen bestselling fantasy authors share details of their personal relationships with Tolkien's mythos, for it inspired them all. Had there been no *Lord of the Rings*, there would also have been no *Earthsea* books by Ursula K. Le Guin; no *Song of Ice and Fire* saga from George R. R. Martin; no *Tales of Discworld* from Terry Pratchett; no *Legends of Alvin Maker* from Orson Scott Card. Each of them was influenced by the master mythmaker, and now each reveals the nature of that influence and their personal relationships with the greatest fantasy novels ever written in the English language. If you've never read the Tolkien books, read these essays and discover the depth and beauty of his work. If you are a fan of *The Lord of the Rings*, the candid comments of these modern mythmakers will give you new insight into the subtlety, power, and majesty of Tolkien's tales and how he told them. *Meditations on Middle-Earth* is a 2002 Hugo Award Nominee for Best Related Work.

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Customer Reviews

If you remember where you were when you first read *The Hobbit* or the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, then this collection of essays by some of fantasy and science fiction's most popular authors is worth a look. J.R.R. Tolkien's impact on fantastic fiction--and its writers--is explored in contributions that range from intensely personal expressions of the power and beauty of Tolkien's work to more analytical examinations of his style, language, and influences. Standouts include Michael Swanwick's thoughtful and powerful meditation on heroism and consequences; Ursula K. Le Guin's analysis of narrative rhythm and language in the trilogy; Terri Windling's moving reflection on an escape from abuse fueled by the power of fairy tales; and Douglas A. Anderson's examination of the critical response to Tolkien's work. This is an uneven collection, with a couple of downright clunkers, but it should appeal to Tolkien aficionados who are interested in the master's influence on those working in the field today. --Roz Genessee

An unapologetic tie-in with the release of the first highly anticipated *Lord of the Rings* film, this anthology presents appreciative essays in honor of the master of Middle-earth from such major fantasy and SF authors as Harry Turtledove, Raymond Feist, Terry Pratchett, George R.R. Martin and the late Poul Anderson. All thank Tolkien, some sardonically, for making the fantasy genre so popular. Ursula K. Le Guin discusses obvious and concealed poetry in the trilogy, while Douglas A. Anderson treats Tolkien's critics, admitting that the posthumously published writings, edited by the author's son, Christopher, are "not always easy to read," a view seconded by several other contributors. Less successful as a scholarly exercise is Orson Scott Card's "How Tolkien Means," which focuses on allegory, a mode Tolkien rejected. Most contributors celebrate the beauty of the writing in the major books, although Michael Swanwick finds them "sad with wisdom" in his essay, "A Changeling Returns." Swanwick takes the lead in pointing out the importance of the humble hobbit Sam Gamgee as a character. In a dialogue between illustrators and brothers Tim and Greg Hildebrandt, Tim admits that "Tolkien was never a big supporter of illustration to accompany works of fantasy." Alas, Howe's vague and unimaginative pencil sketches only serve to support Tolkien's case. Editor Haber offers an adoring but welcome antidote to the more pompous exegeses of the

"author of the century." (Nov. 23) and "Lord of the Rings Redux" (PW, Sept. 10). Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

A wonderful collection of great fantasy authors' comments on the greatest fantasy writer of all. I especially like the originality of Raymond Feist's piece on Tolkien. I highly recommend this for the avid Tolkien fan. Please note, this is a collection of commentary on J.R.R. Tolkien written by current fantasy authors. It is not a collection of short stories by those authors. Please don't purchase this just because your favorite author contributed to it (unless you're a collector of anything and everything he/she writes). If you're going to buy it, then buy it because you love Tolkien and you want to see what his peers have to say about him.

gave it as a gift

It was interesting to read various author's views and thoughts. Some of them may make you angry, some will have you nodding, and there will be laughter. The title is somewhat misleading as it is more of "my meditations on what the Tolkien stories did for fantasy fiction" than any look at the stories themselves or at Middle-Earth. It was MADDENING to have Orcs spelled Ores and to have several other badly done places. I paid for this and I expect more from the editing staff. Poor editing makes me less likely to buy other e-books.

This book was clearly published with the expectation that it'd ride the wave of publicity for the LOTR movies, and perhaps it did. With the movies all on DVD now, maybe it seems less relevant than it once did. As other reviewers have mentioned, the essays in this book vary quite a bit in quality, and they approach the "What Lord of the Rings Means" question from different angles. However, I think the book is worth reading -- once -- for a slightly different reason than Tolkien or LOTR. If you like Tolkien but aren't fanatical about the subject (not *all* of us feel the need to re-read the trilogy once a year), you may still enjoy many of these essays because you can hear how your favorite authors think, the unique way in which they were influenced by what they read... the author's own voice, in other words, rather than the stories they tell. I kept imagining that I was attending a panel about "what LOTR meant to me" at an SF convention, and that many of the authors had interesting things to say. If you take the book from that viewpoint, you'll probably enjoy it. And if you're a writer yourself, you should definitely grab a copy. For instance, Robin Hobb writes about being blown away by Tolkien's ability to create the setting in a novel. ("True setting is far more than descriptive

passages about birch trees in winter, or picturesque villages. Tolkien's setting invoked a time and a place that was as familiar as home to me, yet unfolded the wonders and dangers of all that I had always suspected was just beyond the next hill.") Hobb's novels are masterworks of setting, so you see both the influence on the developing writer, and the reason for their impact. Similarly, Ursula LeGuin sees the books in terms of word rhythms; Charles deLint writes about the impact of the Fairy Story (in the larger, romantic sense). This book gives you a unique view into the minds of the authors you may admire. It also, alas, shows that not all of them are as skilled at writing an essay as they are with fiction. Esther Freisner does a damned good job (funny, too), but a few of the others wander around aimlessly, forgetting to make a point. Again, it's rather like a panel at an SF Con. You shouldn't feel compelled to acquire a copy of this book, but don't pass it by, either. Good library fodder, or perhaps a read-and-pass-on book.

This book really brought back some great memories. And not really in the vein of Tolkien amazingly enough. (I am a major FAN of Tolkien). No, I was shocked that when reading these essays I was quickly thrown back into my teenage years where I would read nothing but sci-fi/fantasy. I had almost forgotten how most of these authors had written in a basic, easy to read style that appealed to a young lad caught up in an adventurous, romantic mind set. I read these books as if I were love starved housewife needing my "Fabio on the cover" fix. The good news is that I eventually outgrew this fixation, learning to read books that weren't written in under a month. But this book made me want to read some of their newer works, and, (gasp), reread some of them. But seriously, this book is well worth the read. Some of the authors aren't all that great at writing non-fiction, (or even fiction for that matter), but it is nice to see them rahpsodizing about Tolkien. It is also very nice to see John Howe's sketches scattered throughout, and his artwork on the cover was one of my favorite pictures long before I ever heard his name. He is an excellent artist, and I am so glad they used him as a conceptual designer on the LOTR' movies. I give here a brief review of half the essays. Karen Haber- Even though she was the editor of this book, her preface wasn't anything to write home about. Okay, I'll say it. It was DUMB. George R.R. Martin- Martin, being stuck with the introduction, gives a short, concise read of what fantasy is and how Tolkien changed it. Well written and likable. Michael Stanwick- I have never had the pleasure of reading Mr. Stanwick, but this gives me the desire to. He relates his experiences reading LOTR, gives a very nice piece on some of the dynamics of the characters, and talks of Tolkien's thoughts on allegory. He then finishes with a wonderfully heartwarming rendition of him reading the books to his young son, and how much more Sam's last words "Well, I'm back." meant to him then. Esther Friesner- This essay was just plain

funny. That is all I really remember. She didn't seem to have much to convey, but she did make me laugh. Terry Pratchett- In true British style, Pratchett brings real comic relief to this book. Just reading a short work as this brings to mind Monty Python, Hitchiker's Guide to the Galaxy, and his very own Discworld. This time he jumps headlong into the question "why is LOTR's still considered a cult classic, when it is the most popular book of the twentieth century?". He answers this in a way that would make Terry Gilliam or John Cleese proud to have written, showing how Mona Lisa and Pride and Prejudice fit into the equation. Bravo. Ursula K. LeGuin- This was probably the best written of the bunch. Bypassing the "this is how I was first introduced to Tolkien's work" that pervades this book, Ursula gives a nice review of how Tolkien wrote his prose almost in a poetic metre. Taking one chapter of the fellowship, she shows how the different beats of action all correlate into a masterful work. Wish I had wrote it. Orson Scott Card- The first page or two was alright, but after that it quickly deteriorated into a study of "serious" vs. "escapist", that lost me in almost every paragraph. While making a few interesting points, it seemed mostly like he was just writing at random, and then forgot to put it into a cohesive format. All I can say is that Card should stick to writing fiction. Hildebrandt Brothers- Before I write anything else, let me say this. I have never liked the brothers art. Sorry, but my bias will probably show in this one. Personally, I don't think that this should have been included in the book. Why not have John Howe or Alan Lee write something instead of this (rather lame) interview. Mostly they just banter back and forth about how skilled they are, talking about all their various projects, and occasionally thanking Tolkien for giving them the source material that made them famous. Pass. Terri Windling- More so than all the others, this essay truly moved me. It recalled the wonderfully romantic (in the classical sense of the word) thoughts, ideas, and feelings that I have always associated with Tolkien, Indeed all fantasy in general. Interestingly enough, it wasn't the LOTR's that made her feel this way, But Tolkien's excellent lecture "On Fairy Stories", a beautiful work on the role of fantasy in the adult life. She also makes some great points about how Disney has changed the way we look at fairy tales, making them something just for children. Placing this essay at the end of the book definitely makes it feel as if they left the one of best for last. Should you read this book? If you are a fan of Tolkien, and don't mind a little light-hearted writing about him, then yes. If however you just happen to like a particular contributor, then you should probably shy away from this one.

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