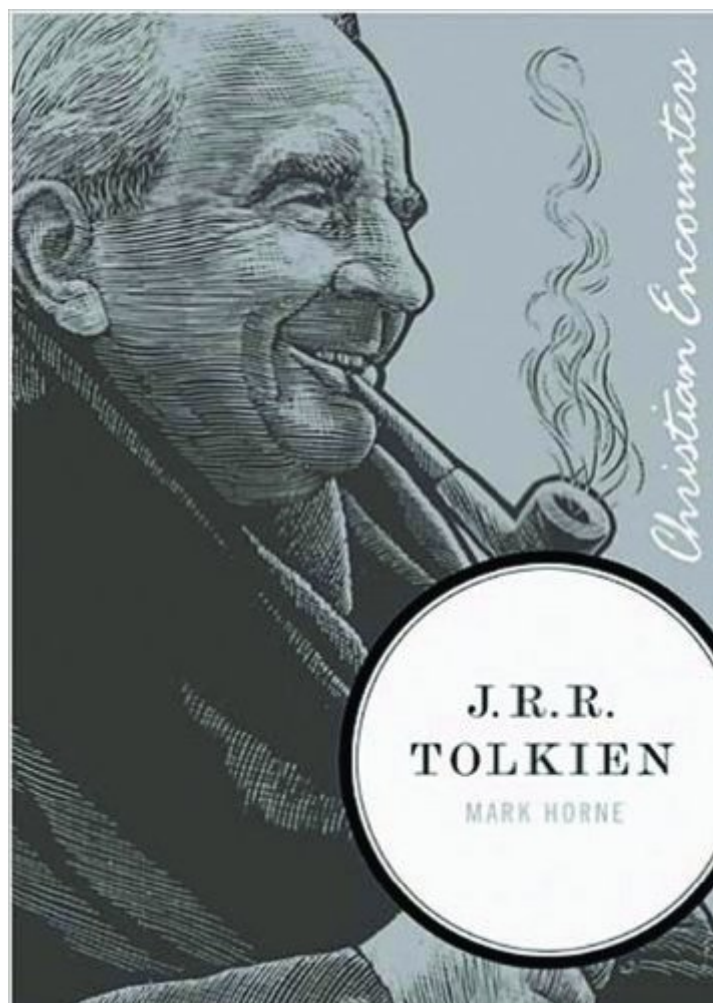


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J.R.R. Tolkien (Christian Encounters Series)



Synopsis

Christian Encounters, a series of biographies from Thomas Nelson Publishers, highlights important lives from all ages and areas of the Church. Some are familiar faces. Others are unexpected guests. But all, through their relationships, struggles, prayers, and desires, uniquely illuminate our shared experience. Born in South Africa and growing up in Great Britain, J.R.R. Tolkien, or Ronald as he was known, led a young life filled with uncertainty and instability. His was not a storybook childhood- his father died when Ronald was three years old, and his mother died just before he reached adolescence. Left under the guardianship of his mother's friend and priest, Ronald forged his closest relationships with friends who shared his love for literature and languages. As Tolkien grew older, married, served as a soldier, and became a well-respected Oxford professor publishing weighty works on Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Beowulf, the Christian faith that his mother had instilled in him continued as an intrinsic element of his creative imagination and his everyday life. It was through The Hobbit and the three-volume The Lord of the Rings that Tolkien became a literary giant throughout the world. In his fiction, which earned him the informal title of "the father of modern fantasy literature," Tolkien presents readers with a vision of freedom- nothing preachy- that a strong, unequivocal faith can transmit.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I started reading JRR Tolkien's LOTR books in 1979, when I was ~12 years old, and just gobbled

them right up. I have been a JRR Tolkien/LOTR "fan" ever since, but it hasn't been until recent years that I've really learned much about him. I have read other works, and DVD special features about JRR Tolkien on the Peter Jackson's cinematic renditions filled in some info, but I still didn't have a good understanding of his life. Nothing stuck well, though, until I read through Mark Horne's biography. I enjoyed reading through it, and it was great learning about the struggle Mr. Tolkien had about his real life's labor, Silmarillion. I had always thought that an after-thought. I also appreciate how Mr. Horne's story relates specific events in JRR Tolkien's life to specific events in his stories. I can see what other reviews have said, that this book is a good starting place, and Mr. Horne is very forthcoming about this as a goal for his work as well as providing what looks like a good list of references for continued reading and research if that is needed. Overall, I think this book is well worth the cost and provides a very approachable rendition of the life of one of my favorite authors. :-)

As I began reading Mark Horne's short biography of J.R.R. Tolkien, I became aware that I've always thought of Tolkien as he was in the last decade of his life--retired to the English countryside, quietly enjoying pipes and the correspondence of distant fans. Of course, that's not the man as he was when he wrote his masterpieces. Horne's book tells the story of how that man--the Tolkien of my imagination--came to be. I was familiar with the broad outlines of Tolkien's life, but mostly by proxy. I've read a number of intellectual or critical books on Tolkien's novels and a few biographies of his friend C.S. Lewis, but never a biography of Tolkien himself. Horne's J.R.R. Tolkien is an excellent place to start. While Horne never delves too deeply into his subject's life, he still manages to evoke a strong impression of Tolkien as a man, intellectual, and artist, a remarkable accomplishment in 130 pages. That impression of Tolkien as a man is one of the best aspects of Horne's book. I knew very well that Tolkien was a genius, but had little idea of what he was like as a person. The anecdotes with which Horne peppers his biography are often humorous, revealing, or both. The final section, assessing Tolkien's influence and legacy, is also excellent considering the few pages spent devoted to them. Horne also spends a good amount of time on something seldom remarked upon about Tolkien (or Lewis, for that matter), which is his experiences during the First World War. I had known that Tolkien saw service in the trenches, but had not known he was involved in the terrible, prolonged agony of the Battle of the Somme or that he fell victim to disease because of conditions on the front. But more important was the lasting effect of the deaths of nearly all his friends from before the war. Horne not only evokes the scale of that tragedy both at large and in Tolkien's life, but also returns to it throughout his book. Tolkien felt the effects of the war for the rest of his

life--Horne makes us feel them, too. Any misgivings I have about the book are minor. There are a few small errors of fact and in one or two places the narrative skips around enough to become confusing, but only briefly. The book is also very short, the shortest of the Christian Encounters series so far, I think. Twenty or thirty more pages may have helped flesh out a few areas--especially toward the end of Tolkien's life, which goes by very quickly compared to the pre-war and pre-Hobbit years--but that's a minor complaint and Horne did an excellent job condensing his subject's life into barely 130 pages. If you're looking for a good, quick introduction to the greatest novelist of the 20th century, Mark Horne's book is a good place to start. Recommended.

This biography of Tolkien's life, writing, and faith is certainly interesting, though not as impressive as I had expected. Tolkien had a hard life. He experienced the loss of both parents and many friends, and had to work very hard to earn himself an education and to make enough to support his family. This biography was successful in capturing the essence of his life and character, but did not go above and beyond that mark. It is a well-researched snapshot into Tolkien's life. There could have been more regarding his Christian faith (especially considering this is part of the Christian Encounters Series). I am not convinced by this work that his faith was actually a driving force to his life and writing, though the book does describe him as having strong convictions regarding the Roman Catholic Church. Nevertheless it was certainly an appealing and worthwhile read, especially for its short length, and I feel I learned a bit about Tolkien's life and its reflection in his writing. I recommend it to anyone who wants to understand the basics of Tolkien's life, and although many details of his literary works are discussed, I think it would be easy to follow without being familiar with his writing. I received a complimentary ebook as a part of the Thomas Nelson Book Review Blogging Program through booksneeze.com.

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