

Author Read Alike

J.R.R. Tolkien

Genre: Fantasy

Anyone who enjoyed Peter Jackson's film versions of the classic fantasy saga *The Lord of the Rings* may want to see and read the books which inspired the films.

For a better understanding of the plot and characters, interested readers should begin with the prequel to the trilogy and its many spin-offs later in J.R.R. Tolkien's career. The prequel is entitled *The Hobbit*, and lays the groundwork for the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In the prequel, the story opens with the Hobbit Bilbo Baggins being drawn into a journey with a group of dwarves at the instigation of his wizard friend Gandalf the Grey. Baggins has many adventures along the way, including finding a magic ring in a cave inhabited by a vile creature, Gollum. This isolated

creature, once a Hobbit as well, transformed over a long time into his present form. Bilbo finds a magic ring and escapes the villainous creature who is obsessed with the ring. This very ring becomes an important focal point of the trilogy.

Tolkien's genius was to employ a bardic style to his tales in the great tradition of the heroic epics which preceded him throughout Europe. He was also influenced by his personal WWI experiences, Catholicism, Christianity, and the effects of ever more complex industrialization on the biosphere.

Because he had an etymological interest in the formation of languages, he used this background to construct the mythological languages of his fictitious backdrop, \

known as *Middle-Earth*. An example of this is the beautiful, lyrical language he constructed for his *Elvish* characters, such as *Lord Elrond of Rivendell*.



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Read Alike—C.S. Lewis

Readers who appreciate the *Lord of the Rings* and related stories may not know that Tolkien was a good friend of his scholarly associate C.S. Lewis and that it was Tolkien who played a hand in Lewis's conversion to Christianity. It was this conversion in turn that led Lewis to create his own version of a classic epic fantasy.

His *Narnia* series resemble his friend's in that he too used Christian symbols and themes as a foundation for his stories. His are more recognizable that Tolkien's, however.

The Chronicles of Narnia center around the experiences of four British children, who like Bilbo and

Frodo Baggins in Tolkien's works, go through transformative adventures to learn basic truths about fortitude, valor, and how to defeat evil. These tales are well worth a read.

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Read-a-likes - George Lucas, Donald F. Glut, &

These authors wrote the novelized versions of *Star Wars* episodes IV, V, & VI, the original three films of the now expanded intergalactic saga. Although science fiction, the immense sweep of the saga is epic in nature as are the backdrops of Tolkien and Lewis. There are plenty of similar themes

to the this saga's fantasy counterparts.

In Lucas's novel, young Luke Skywalker, a teen farm boy of the planet *Tatooine* is drawn into a transformative apprenticeship to become a *Jedi Knight* and a Rebel soldier in a distant galaxy's quest to defy and overcome

Emperor Palpatine and his assistant, Lord Vader.

The episodes' plots share the transformative themes, as well as themes of finding hidden abilities and strengths, using objects or forces to overcome evil, and the allusion or symbolism of Tolkien's and Lewis's plots.

Read-a-like - Terry Brooks

Author Terry Brooks, while he lacks the complexity of Tolkien or Lewis, does share some characteristics of his predecessors. These include stories which are populated with elves, wraiths, and wizards or magic men (Druids in this case). Also, his works contain the theme of a young and untried hero,

such as Luke Skywalker, Frodo Baggins, or Lewis's British children.

Brooks's *Shannara* series begins with a very Tolkienesque plot of a band of heroes setting off to reclaim a phenomenal sword. The band is replete with men, elves, dwarves, and a seer

who brings to mind the wizard Gandalf in Tolkien's works. They must go to a dark, evil realm belonging to the *Warlock Lord* who, along with his realm, bears a striking parallel to the *Dark Lord Sauron* in *Mordor*, which Frodo and his friend Sam enter in the *Lord of the Rings* saga.

Read-a-like - Lloyd Alexander

Although Lloyd Alexander wrote juvenile literature, his themes, especially in the *Prydain Chronicles*, share some of the shared themes classically treated in fantasy and some science fiction epics. Resembling the *Tatooinean* farm boy Luke, another farm boy, Taran, gets drawn into a quest to

locate a stolen oracular pig that he was given charge of in the *Book of Three*. The Horned King is the evil kidnapper who Taran must seek out. In a classic quest about good struggling to conquer evil, Taran meets companions along the way, including Prince Gwydion, who helps solidify Taran's leadership

skills, the apprentice witch Eilonwy, and a bard called Ffluddur.

White magic is pitted against black magic as it is in Tolkien, Lewis, Lucas, and others who followed in the grand tradition of the magical tale-spinners of yore.