SOFTWARE & TECH

# History Of Middle Earth Complete Set

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## Introduction: Unveiling the Depth of Middle-earth

For millions of readers worldwide, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* represent the pinnacle of fantasy literature. Yet behind these beloved tales lies a vast, intricate, and ever-evolving mythology that Tolkien labored over for most of his life. Much of this material remained unpublished at his death in 1973, locked away in notebooks and typescripts. It fell to his son, Christopher Tolkien, to edit, arrange, and publish this monumental body of work. The result is the **History Of Middle Earth Complete Set**, a twelve-volume series that represents one of the most profound literary archaeology projects ever undertaken. This article explores the origins, content, significance, and enduring appeal of this extraordinary collection, offering both newcomers and long-time fans a comprehensive guide to what many consider the essential companion to Tolkien's published works.

## What Is the History Of Middle Earth Complete Set?

The **History of Middle-earth Complete Set** (often abbreviated as *HoME*) is a series of books published between 1983 and 1996. It collects and annotates the vast majority of J.R.R. Tolkien's writings about his secondary world, including early drafts, abandoned storylines, linguistic essays, cosmological treatises, and detailed chronological accounts. The series is not a single narrative but rather a scholarly edition that reveals the creative process behind the legendarium. Each volume is edited by Christopher Tolkien, who provides extensive commentary, notes, and analysis to contextualize the often fragmentary texts.

The complete set comprises twelve volumes, beginning with *The Book of Lost Tales, Part One* and ending with *The Peoples of Middle-earth*. Some editions also include an index volume. The sheer scale of the project—over 5,000 pages in total—makes it a daunting but rewarding undertaking. For those who wish to understand how Middle-earth truly came into being, from its earliest mythic conceptions to the final refinements of the Appendices, the History Of Middle Earth Complete Set is irreplaceable.

## The Origins of the Series: Christopher Tolkien's Lifelong Task

### The Father's Legacy, the Son's Dedication

After J.R.R. Tolkien's death, his literary estate faced a monumental challenge. The author had left behind a sprawling archive of manuscripts, many of which were written decades apart, revised multiple times, and often lacked clear chronological order. Christopher Tolkien, himself a scholar and former editor of his father's works, recognized that simply publishing a "definitive" Silmarillion would not do justice to the complexity of the material. Instead, he opted for a historical approach: presenting the texts in the order they were written, showing how Tolkien's ideas evolved over sixty years.

The first volume, *The Book of Lost Tales*(published in two parts in 1983 and 1984), draws from the earliest narratives Tolkien wrote in the 1910s. These are not polished stories but rather embryonic myths—Tolkien's first

attempts to create a mythology for England, influenced by Finnish and Welsh legends. Christopher's editorial work involved deciphering often messy handwriting, choosing between conflicting versions, and explaining the connections to later works. This painstaking process set the template for the entire series.

### Publication Timeline of the Complete Set

The **History Of Middle Earth Complete Set**was released over the course of thirteen years. Below is the publication order:

- Volume 1: The Book of Lost Tales, Part One (1983)
- Volume 2: The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two (1984)
- Volume 3: The Lays of Beleriand (1985)
- Volume 4: The Shaping of Middle-earth (1986)
- Volume 5: The Lost Road and Other Writings (1987)
- Volume 6: The Return of the Shadow (1988) – covers the early drafts of The Lord of the Rings
- Volume 7: The Treason of Isengard (1989)
- Volume 8: The War of the Ring (1990)
- Volume 9: Sauron Defeated (1992) – includes the final stages of The Lord of the Rings and the Númenor material
- Volume 10: Morgoth's Ring (1993) – covers later Silmarillion writing and philosophical essays
- Volume 11: The War of the Jewels (1994) – further Silmarillion drafts and the Grey Annals
- Volume 12: The Peoples of Middle-earth (1996) – includes late essays, the Appendices development, and the unfinished "New Shadow"

The entire set was later collected into a single boxed edition, often referred to as the **History of Middle-earth Complete Set box set**, which has become a prized possession for collectors.

## Content Overview: A Deep Dive into Each Volume

### The Early Years: Lost Tales and Lays

The first three volumes of the History Of Middle Earth Complete Set are often the most challenging for casual readers, as they present the raw, unpolished mythology. *The Book of Lost Tales* is essentially a frame-story of a mariner named Eriol who visits the Lonely Island and hears tales of the Elves. Here we meet names that will later become familiar—Túrin, Beren, Lúthien—but in very different forms. For example, the original version of the Fall of Gondolin is far more influenced by Norse mythology than the version in *The Silmarillion*. *The Lays of Beleriand*contains two long narrative poems: the "Lay of the Children of Húrin" (in alliterative verse) and the "Lay of Leithian" (the story of Beren and Lúthien in rhyming couplets). Christopher Tolkien's commentary reveals how Tolkien struggled with meter and storytelling.

### The Shaping of the World

From Volume 4 onward, the series shifts to more structured world-building. *The Shaping of Middle-earth* includes the earliest "Silmarillion" prose, the first maps, and the fascinating *Ambarkanta* (the shape of the world). This volume is essential for understanding Tolkien's cosmology, including the flat world and the creation of the Sun and Moon. *The Lost Road and Other Writings* introduces the concept of Númenor and the Atlantis-like downfall, as well as the time-travel story that inspired later works like *The Notion Club Papers*.

### The Lord of the Rings Drafts: A Writer's Workshop

Volumes 6 through 9 are arguably the most accessible and intriguing part of the **History Of Middle Earth Complete Set**. They document the creation of *The Lord of the Rings* in extraordinary detail. Readers witness the story's evolution from a simple sequel to *The Hobbit*(featuring a hobbit named Bingo Bolger-Baggins) into the epic we know today. Christopher Tolkien reproduces abandoned plotlines, character name changes, and the gradual development of key scenes like the Council of Elrond, the Mines of Moria, and the destruction of the

Ring. These volumes offer a masterclass in narrative revision and show how Tolkien's perfectionism drove him to endless rewrites.

### Late Writings: Philosophy and Fulfillment

The final three volumes, *Morgoth's Ring*, *The War of the Jewels*, and *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, contain some of the most profound and reflective texts. *Morgoth's Ring* includes the famous "Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth" (a philosophical dialogue between an Elf and a mortal woman about death and hope) as well as Tolkien's later attempts to reconcile his mythology with Christian theology. *The War of the Jewels* contains the complete *Grey Annals* and the final version of the *Quenta Silmarillion*—the closest the legendarium came to a finished form. *The Peoples of Middle-earth*tackles the later history of the Third Age, including the Appendices, the Estel (faith) of the Dúnedain, and the abandoned sequel "The New Shadow."

## The Evolution of Middle-earth's Mythology

### From Flat World to Round World

One of the most fascinating aspects of the **History Of Middle Earth Complete Set**is the opportunity to trace Tolkien's changing conception of the cosmos. In early writings, Arda (the world) was flat, and the stars were lamps. Later, Tolkien adopted a round-world cosmology to avoid conflicts with modern science, but he struggled to reconcile this with the Elvish myths of the Two Trees and the Downfall of Númenor. The editorial commentary in volumes 4 and 10 highlights this philosophical tension.

### The Changing Nature of the Elves

Early Elves in the *Book of Lost Tales* are nearly indistinguishable from fairies—small, capricious beings. Over the decades, they evolved into the majestic, tragic, and wise beings of *The Lord of the Rings*. The History Of Middle Earth Complete Set documents this transformation, showing how Tolkien deepened their history, language, and psychology. The development of the Eldarin languages (Quenya and Sindarin) is also thoroughly explored in these volumes, with numerous etymologies and grammatical notes.

### The Problem of Evil and Mortality

Tolkien never completed a fully satisfying account of the origin of Orcs or the nature of evil. In the later volumes, particularly *Morgoth's Ring*, we see Tolkien wrestling with these theological issues. He considered ideas like Orcs being corrupted Elves, or being bred from Men, or being purely organic beings without souls. The essays on the nature of death and the Gift of Ilúvatar to Men are some of the most poignant writings in the entire series. These philosophical meditations are a major reason why scholars and theologians value the History Of Middle Earth Complete Set highly.

## Editions and Collecting the Complete Set

### Hardcover vs. Paperback

The **History Of Middle Earth Complete Set** has been published in several editions. The original hardcovers from HarperCollins and Houghton Mifflin are highly collectible, often featuring dust jackets with artwork by John Howe or Alan Lee. Later deluxe editions, released in the 2000s, matched the look of the *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit*deluxe volumes. The paperback editions (often in three-volume omnibuses or individual per volume) are more affordable and widely available. However, the paperback paper quality can be thin, and the text is densely packed. Many serious students prefer the hardcover set for durability and readability.

### Boxed Sets and Complete Collections

Perhaps the most desirable format for collectors is the **History of Middle-earth Complete Set box set**, which gathers all twelve volumes in a single slipcase. This edition (published by HarperCollins in 2006) has become a status symbol in Tolkien fandom. The box is sturdy, the spines are uniform, and the set presents a cohesive

library.

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