A Book That Influenced Me

Happily Ever After wasn’t enough for me after I finished reading J. R. R. Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings trilogy – and that was the first moment I knew I was born to write fantasy novels.

I’d read other books before, of course, and even enjoyed myself with some of the traditional literary “classics” like Alice in Wonderland. But I wasn’t an author then. I had come up with a few short tales, mostly based on the made-up adventures of inanimate objects around my home, but I had never seen anything like Lord of the Rings before. At least, that was what I told myself. I let myself forget that I had watched the “Star Wars” movies and was engrossed with Harry Potter, although neither of them made me want to stop everything I was doing and take out a pen.

For years, I was confused about why I chose Lord of the Rings. Why, out of all the books I read as a child, did this series captivate me in the way that Harry Potter and “Star Wars” couldn’t? After years of producing not only fanfiction but also autobiographical pieces about Tolkien’s influence on my life, I have come to the conclusion that I loved the hopelessness that somehow worked out in the end. One of my favorite movies as a child, “The Prince of Egypt,” said that “though hope is frail, it’s hard to kill;” I never truly understood this line until I was picturing the looks on the faces of Tolkien’s characters, first in the books and later in the movies, as they knew they were using swords to fight a metaphysical foe infinitely stronger than them with only the tiniest weakness.

In this near-hopelessness, I found a parallel to my own life. During my childhood, most days I too felt like I was fighting a battle that I could keep at a stalemate, but could never win. My obsessive-compulsive disorder meant that although I was very creative, I was limited in how much effort I could put into coming up with the fantastical stories I loved to read and yearned to write. My brain was simply too busy cycling through its own repetitive patterns. Ashamed of myself, I told myself that fantasy series like Lord of the Rings were only for nerds, or geeks, or boys. I ignored my dad’s attempts to get me involved with both the text and the movies, and yet when I was finally confronted with the image of Arwen galloping on a horse across my TV screen with Frodo about to fail in his quest, I was unable to look away.

The next few weeks passed in a blur. I read the books whenever I had time, I started working out so I could watch the movies while I exercised. I pored through the text, every word, and delighted in the fact that in addition to my brain liking to repeat the worries that plagued me, it also liked to repeat my favorite quotes, facts, and anecdotes about the characters. It wasn’t too long before I created my own original character in the Tolkien universe, and began my rocky yet rewarding journey as a fanfiction writer that I continue even today, on a new online platform.

Lord of the Rings started out as an escape to a fantasy world where heroes could succeed no matter what the odds, where a weakness could become a strength. I drew on this strength for years, and even now when I feel troubled I return to my old beat-up copy of the novels all put together that accompanies me wherever I go. And, in a way, Lord of the Rings was a cure for me. It showed me, in hundreds of pages that filled my imagination with wondrous ideas that formed many stories of mine throughout the years, that my mind’s capability to dive too deeply into things could be a blessing as well as a curse. I could make the conscious choice to fill my mind with stories, make them so plentiful that obsessive thoughts had to fight their way in. In other words, I might have still considered myself rather small, but in Tolkien’s epic, I learned that even someone small who doubts their own capability to succeed can change entire worlds – or in my case, create them.

In the city of Ithilien, on the edge of an unwinnable battle, Samwise Gamgee said, “Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn’t. They kept going. Because they were holding onto something.” Holding onto Lord of the Rings enabled me to rewrite my own story, something I will always be grateful for. My future works, enabled by this renewal, will look to Tolkien as an inspiration and an influence, in both teaching me to weave beautiful prose as well as helping me discover my own identity as an author.