

a letter from J.R.R.T. MICHAEL LIGHTOWLERS



foole-earth has had more than a few admirers since its first discovery in 1937, but those who can claim to have recognised its importance before 1965, when it became a subject for American campus-madness, usually do so with pride. Justin Arundale, then a resident of Uganda, found his way into Tolkien's country in 1962 at the age of eight, with less experience, and from a greater distance, than many of Tolkien's English fans. Tantalised by mentions of Tolkien's own unpublished sourcebook, he wrote to the Professor, asking hopefully for further information about *The Silmarillion*:

P.O. Box 215,
Mbale,
Uganda.

Dear Mr. Tolkien,

I have read The Lord of the Rings several times. I enjoyed it very much indeed. Please can you tell me if the Silmarillion is going to be published soon?

I am going to ask my grandmother to buy it for me because I live so far away. Her address is 6, Windsor Road, Cambridge. Thank you very much.

Yours,
Justin Arundale.

Tolkien's response was distinctive both in style and in hand. He judged, fairly accurately, to whom he was writing, and tailored his words to give the desired effect. (See reproduction of his letter, overleaf.)

I can say from personal experience that Justin's was not the only querulous demand for more from the reading public (though I am sad to say that my own was directed to the publisher, whose replies are not so highly prized, however neat and polite). Tolkien must have spent a considerable portion of his time, even as early as 1964, responding to this kind of demanding admiration.

It is a short letter, and his explanation is obviously one that he has



had to repeat on many occasions; but the rather coy allusion to Cambridge bookshops (prompted, I suspect, by the legendary partisan loyalty that one is supposed to feel for one's own University bookshops), and the whimsical reference to *Uncle Remus*, seem to me to arise from Tolkien's own delight in his task. It is almost as if he were finding out for the first time how fond others had become of his discovery.

76 Sandfield Road
Headington,
Oxford. 18/1/69

Dear Justin,

Thank you for your letter. I am afraid the "Silmarillion" is not yet published and will not be for some time.

I have a great deal of other work to do, and not much time.

I am afraid I must leave you to tell your grandmother this sad fact (though I expect the Cambridge booksellers would do so): for one thing you did not tell me her name. It might be Arundale, but then as is said in 'Brer Rabbit':
'den again it mount'it'.

Yours sincerely
J.R.R. Tolkien.