

“You Shall Not Pass!”: Tolkienian (Social) Media Discourse of the Russian- Ukrainian War, an Overview

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Middle-Earth during the Cold War

“To ask if Orcs ‘are’ Communists is to me as sensible as asking if Communists are Orcs” (Letters, 262). He was especially rankled by Ake Ohlmarks’s introduction to the 1961 Swedish translation of *The Lord of the Rings*, which suggested **correspondences between Sauron and Stalin, or between Mordor and Russia**. “I utterly repudiate any such ‘reading’, which angers me,” Tolkien wrote to his publishers Allen & Unwin. (Letters, 307).

(Michael D.C. Drout. *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia_Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. 2007, Routledge, p. 6)



Mordor in the Western popular imagination



Orcs of the Russian-Ukrainian War



Wikipedia: "Since the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian War in 2014, Ukrainians have used the term as a pejorative for Russian forces. During the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Ukrainians began to massively use the term "orcs" in relation to Russian military personnel and their war crimes. *Al Jazeera English* and *Politico* included the term as an example of the "new language of war in Ukraine".

Orcs (орки) from Mordor (Мордор)

"In J. R. R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" novels, orc are the vicious foot-soldiers who serve the Dark Lord Sauron in his quest to rule Middle-earth. In Ukraine, an "orc" is a member of Russia's invading forces, who have been looting, pillaging and terrorizing in service of President Vladimir Putin.

In Tolkien's books, Mordor is Sauron's evil realm; in Ukraine, Mordor is slang for Russia.

Both words have been used by everyone from Volodymyr Zelenskyy down.."

(Zoya Sheftalovich "The Rashists from Mordor vs. the Tractor Troops: Ukraine's new language of war. An English-language guide to Ukrainian slang" / Politico. June 24, 2022)

Why orcs?

1. There is a long tradition to call the USSR/Russia Mordor.
2. The atrocities of the Russian occupying troops. Nightly shelling of the cities. Cruelty and contempt even towards each other.
3. Not all Russians are ethnic Slavs, there are such groups as the Chechens (who resemble Middle Eastern peoples) and the Buryats (Mongoloid people) and others who behave in a particularly ruthless manner (the Bucha tragedy is largely blamed on the Buryats).
4. Defilement of the Land.



Tolkienian discourse since the Maidan

“Contrary to what one might believe, this comparison does not date back to 2022. As far back as 2015, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko used the word "Mordor" to refer to Putin's concept of a "New Russia," which incorporates the eastern Ukrainian territories controlled by pro-Russian separatists into the Russian Federation. In 2016, Google's translation tool was hacked to yield "мордор," Mordor, when translating the word "Russia" from Ukrainian”.

(Damien Leloup “Ukrainian and Russian Tolkien fans battle over the legacy of 'The Lord of the Rings’”. Le Mond, April 23, 2022)



The Map: Ukraine-Middle-earth



This map was created by a Kryvyi Rih artist nicknamed pro101men sometime in late summer 2022

https://www.artstation.com/pro101men/prints?print_type=art_print



Vitalii Kim, the Governor of Mykolaiv Oblast

Mykolaiv. Information on 19:05, February 28, 2022

Good evening, we are from Ukraine!

Be prepared, the **Orcs are coming** and attacking today. A large column of military vehicles is approaching from two directions.

Men, prepare to fire your weapons and burn them with whatever you have at hand. Women, stay at home.

The occupiers get scared when they see resistance and immediately flee.

Have a good and peaceful night everyone. Please take care of yourselves.

Let's "welcome" them!



Art by the Mykolaiv illustrator Nastya Belaya (at first, she wanted to depict Kim as an elf but decided on a hobbit – Frodo in myrtil mail shirt)

Political discourse & the International support



Defence of Ukraine ✓

@DefenceU

Ukraine government organization

Year of 9 of the the New Age.

Council of Elrond is bringing together free nations of the Middle-Earth to discuss how to prevail over the Evil from Mordor. Delegation is led by

[@oleksiireznikov](#)

Перекласти твіт



13:00 · 15 черв. 22 · [Twitter Web App](#)



Paul Massaro ✓

@apmassaro3

This one is good



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Andrius Tapinas

@AndriusTapinas

We bought 110 antidrone guns for Ukraine and named then Orcrist - Orc Killer.

Today we added 80 Wingman - NATO approved radars which allows antidrone operator detect and shoot down russian drone without seeing it up to 5 km away.

Price tag: 1 095 000 euro.



Reception in the Western Media



Russia's Side: Self-perception

The European part of Russia, especially Moscow, is Gondor and the Asian part, or Siberia, is Mordor. This is deeply rooted in the historical (the Asian part was conquered in the 17th-19th centuries and the indigenous peoples were subjugated and reduced to second-class citizens), social (huge gap in living standards) and racial (the Siberian population is very much of Mongolian type) realities of this country.



Russia's Side: Self-perception

The ironic self-perception of Russians as Orcs is reflected in the art of Moscow-based artist Tony Sart.

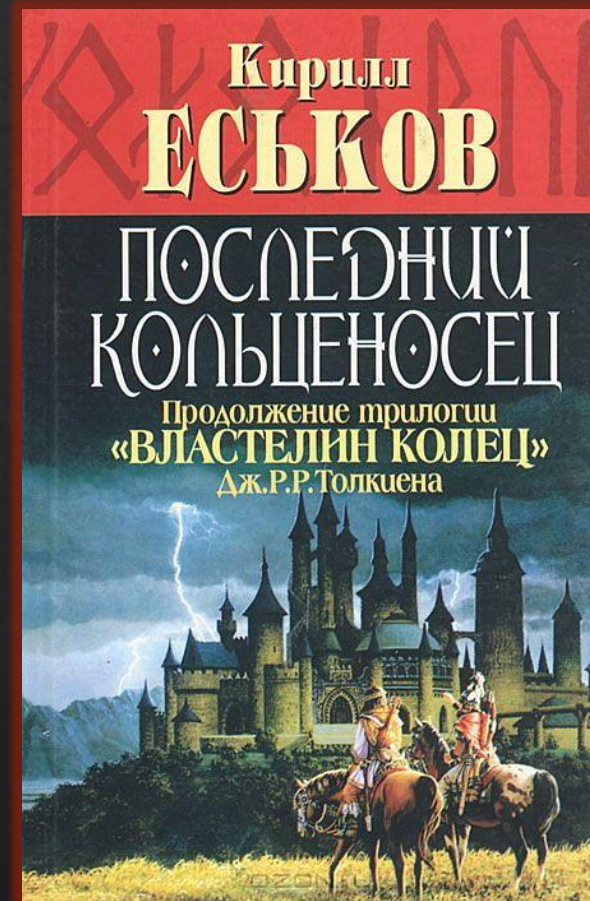


Russia's Side: Tolkien Fandom Developments



Fanfiction re-writing *The Silmarillion*

"The Black Book of Arda" ("Чёрная книга Арды" or "ЧКА", first version - 1990) is one of the most famous fanfiction works of the Tolkien fandom in Russia. The book's authors are **Natalia Vasilyeva** (Elhe Niennah) and **Natalia Nekrasova** (Illet). The book describes the events of the first ages of Arda's history from the point of view of the Dark Forces.



Fanfiction re-writing of LOTR

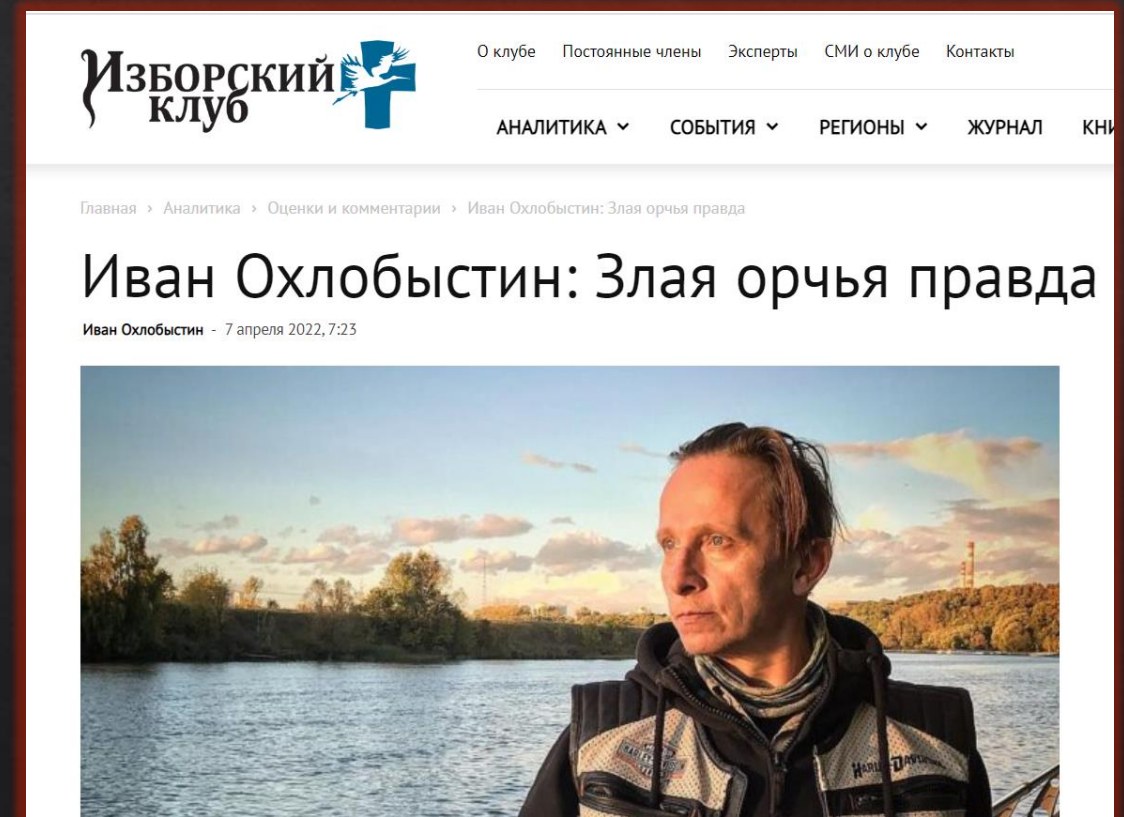
In 1999, **Kirill Eskov** published a retelling of Tolkien's under the title 'The Last Ringbearer'. It follows a group of Elves, led by Gandalf, who wage unceasing war against the peaceful realm of Sauron; eventually Sauron succeeds in defeating them, destroying their treacherous magic and ushering in a new age of progress and prosperity.

Russia's Side: Ivan Okhlobystin's "Orcs' Angry Truth"

"They [here he means the so-called collective West and Ukraine combined] have insulted us in any possible way. They have called us all possible names. Russcists, vatniks, and orcs. The latter is very symbolic.

Orcs in game worlds are green, toothy, fearless monsters born by the earth and see no other purpose than an endless, bloody battle. Perhaps our enemies have a point. We really haven't seen anything else. We just haven't had the chance.

Perhaps things could have been different if the world had been kinder to us. Most importantly, we have sincerely tried not to be what they thought we were".



7 April 2022, 7:23

Russia's Side: "Goida!"

On 30 September, Okhlobystin also appeared at a concert dedicated to the 'accession' of the DPR, LPR, Kherson and Zaporizhia regions to Russia. The pro-Kremlin actor gave a fiery speech in which he described the war in Ukraine as a 'holy war'. He also proposed the reintroduction of the "old Russian" word "goida" - a call to violence meaning "blood!; kill!; attack!".



Ногу Свело! - Гимн Обреченных (Гойда, Орки!)

Almost immediately, the Russian rock band "Nogu svelo", who strongly oppose the war, responded to this performance by including a monstrous version of Okhlobystin and his war cry "Goida!" in their new video clip for the song "Anthem of the Doomed (Goida, Orcs!)"

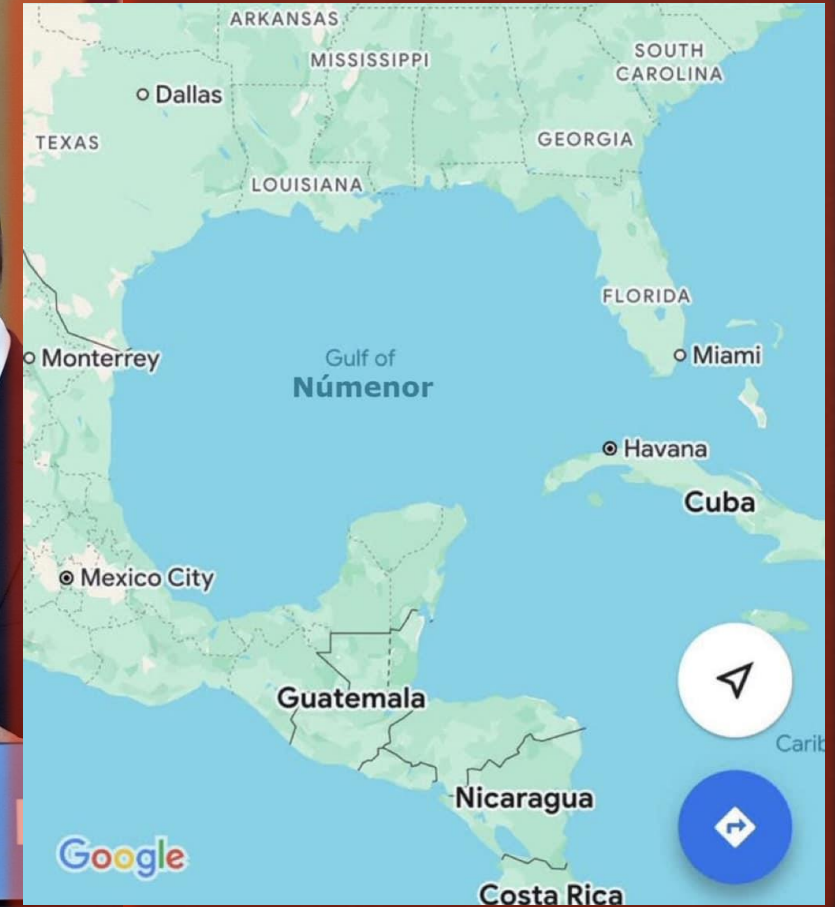
Meme Culture: Putin as Sauron



Meme Culture: Putin as Sauron – Politics of Lies



Meme Culture: Putin as Sauron – Politics of Manipulation and Secret Unions



Meme Culture: Putin as Sauron – Politics of Destruction



Meme Culture: Belarus as Isengard, Lukashenko as Saruman



“And now, I will show you whence they were preparing the attack on Belarus”



Meme Culture: Sergey Lavrov

The Mouth of Sauron finally revealed!



The mouthpiece of the vile leader of the orc armies has finally been unmasked, as none other than Sergei Lavrov the vile mouthpiece of the current leader of the orc armies.

Meme Culture:
Reaction to
Events: the
Explosion on the
Crimean Bridge

Bayeux Tapestry
Crimean bridge
(08.10.2022)



Meme Culture: Reaction to Events - Supply of Weapons



The Rings of Power

Для неформальной встречи лидеров стран СНГ
подготовлено 9 клубных колец с поздравлением к Новому году!



1. РОССИЯ - ПУТИН Владимир Владимирович
2. АЗЕРБАЙДЖАН - АЛИЕВ Ильхам Гейдарович
3. АРМЕНИЯ - ПАШИНЯН Никол Воваевич
4. БЕЛОРУССИЯ - ЛУКАШЕНКО Александр Григорьевич
5. КАЗАХСТАН - ТОКАЕВ Касым-Жомарт Кемелевич
6. КИРГИЗСТАН - ЖАПАРОВ Садыр Нургожоевич
7. ТАДЖИКИСТАН - Эмомали РАХМОН
8. ТУРКМЕНИСТАН - БЕРДЫМУХАМЕДОВ Сердар Гурбангулыевич
9. УЗБЕКИСТАН - МИРЗИЁЕВ Шавкат Миромонович



“Putin got tired of being the Hitler of the 21st century and decided to play Lord of the Rings and become a "mighty Sauron". He presented the participants of the informal summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States with rings with the symbol of the "commonwealth“”.

(Oleksiy Goncharenko, Vice President of the PACE Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, Ukrainian MP)

Thank you for your attention!

