

The Hobbit



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN

As a child, Tolkien was an excellent student, and enjoyed reading imaginative fiction like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll. He also developed a passion for languages, even inventing a language called Nevbosh with his cousins. Tolkien studied English literature at Oxford University, and married a woman named Edith Bratt shortly after his graduation. He fought in World War One, including in the infamous Battle of the Somme, where he lost many of his closest friends. After the war, Tolkien began a brilliant career as a scholar of Old and Middle English. His translation of the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is still widely taught, and his celebrated lecture on the poem *Beowulf* is often credited with sparking a renewed interest in early English poetry. With the publication of *The Hobbit* in 1937 and *The Lord of the Rings* in the mid-1950s, Tolkien became world-famous. Though he had more than enough money retire from academic life, he continued to teach at Oxford University until his death in 1977.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Tolkien fought in World War One, and though *The Hobbit* is a work of fantasy, his experiences as a soldier in France clearly informed his writing. When Yugoslavian nationalists assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, the Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war on Serbia, and the two nations' military alliances with other countries eventually drew all of Europe into a military conflict. Italy formed an uneasy alliance with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while England formed an alliance with France and Russia. The complicated five-way battle at the end of *The Hobbit*, which leads to a series of hastily-established alliances and treaties, might be Tolkien's version of World War One.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The success of *The Hobbit* inspired Tolkien to write the three longer novels about Middle Earth collectively known as *The Lord of the Rings*: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), *The Two Towers* (1954), and *The Return of the King* (1955). At the time of his death, Tolkien left behind a huge collection of stories, poems, and fragments of stories and mythology set in Middle Earth and its surrounding universe that his son, Christopher Tolkien, later published. The best known of these posthumous works is *The Silmarillion* (1977), a prequel of sorts to the events in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien's success may

have inspired his friend, C.S. Lewis, to publish his own series of richly detailed fantasy novels, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. *The Hobbit* also has a lot in common with early epic poems. Like *Beowulf*, it features a dragon; like *The Odyssey*, its hero grows into something of a trickster who enjoys reinventing himself.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*
- **Where Written:** Pembroke College, Oxford
- **When Published:** September 21, 1937
- **Genre:** Fantasy; Epic
- **Setting:** Middle Earth
- **Climax:** The Battle of the Five Armies
- **Antagonist:** Smaug the dragon
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

The greatest teacher you never had: Tolkien's academic research at Oxford put him in touch with some of the greatest British writers of the time, including C.S. Lewis, with whom Tolkien was close friends for many years. At the end of Tolkien's life, he received a letter from the poet W.H. Auden, who had attended a lecture Tolkien delivered on the poem *Beowulf*. Tolkien's knowledge and passion inspired Auden to continue writing poetry!

Development Hell: As soon as Tolkien published his Middle Earth novels, people tried to adapt them as films. One of the funniest ideas for a Tolkien movie came from the Beatles in the 1960s – George Harrison wanted to play Gandalf, Ringo wanted to play Sam, and John Lennon wanted to play Gollum! Wisely, Tolkien refused to let the Fab Four play hobbits and wizards, and at the time of his death, there were no live-action Middle Earth films. A quarter century later, New Line Cinema acquired the rights to Tolkien's work, and Peter Jackson directed three *Lord of the Rings* films and another three based on the *Hobbit*.



PLOT SUMMARY

Bilbo Baggins is a hobbit who lives in a large, comfortable underground house in the Shire and has no interest in adventures. One day, he encounters Gandalf, a wizard who knew Bilbo's scandalously adventurous grandfather. Though he's uncomfortable that Gandalf talks about Bilbo joining an

adventure, Bilbo invites Gandalf to tea the next day. At tea, Gandalf brings with him thirteen dwarves, lead by Thorin Oakenshield, who are trying to reclaim their ancestral home and treasure under the Lonely Mountain from the dragon Smaug. Gandalf and the dwarves offer Bilbo one-fourteenth of their treasure in return for his serving as their burglar. Bilbo doesn't explicitly consent to this agreement, but he's excited by the dwarves' stories of treasure.

The next day, Gandalf tells Bilbo that he must meet the dwarves at the local tavern; Bilbo rushes there, and finds himself traveling with Gandalf and the dwarves on their quest to the Lonely Mountain. Shortly thereafter, Gandalf goes missing, it starts to rain, and the dwarves see a light in the distance. Bilbo goes to investigate the light, and finds three trolls eating their supper. The trolls catch Bilbo, but he slips free; then, the trolls capture the thirteen dwarves. Gandalf imitates the sounds of the trolls' voices, leading them to fight for so long that the sun rises and turns them to stone. The dwarves free themselves and find two swords. Bilbo finds a large knife that will work as a sword for him, too.

The group rests in the Elven city of Rivendell under the care of the elf-lord Elrond. While there they learn that they will be able to enter a secret passageway in the side of the Lonely Mountain on the first day of the dwarf New Year. They travel through the Misty Mountains, where they are all imprisoned by goblins, except for Gandalf who escapes. Bilbo and the dwarves are taken before the Great Goblin, but Gandalf reappears, slays the Great Goblin, and frees Bilbo and the dwarves. In the ensuing flight from the goblins, Bilbo falls down a cavern and loses consciousness.

Bilbo reawakens in a dark cavern and finds a ring lying on the ground. Not long after he encounters a treacherous creature, Gollum, with whom he holds a riddle-telling competition: if Gollum wins, he eats Bilbo; if Bilbo wins, Gollum shows him the way out. Bilbo wins the competition, but Gollum goes to find his ring, which makes the wearer invisible, so that he can kill Bilbo. When Gollum discovers the ring is missing he is enraged and plans to kill Bilbo. But Bilbo accidentally puts on the ring and realizes that the ring makes him invisible when Gollum, searching for him, ends up rushing right past him. Bilbo follows Gollum out of the cave and eludes goblins to escape from the Misty Mountains.

Bilbo reunites with Gandalf and the dwarves, who are impressed with his talent for deception and concealment. As they travel down from the mountains, they're forced to hide in some trees from some wargs (talking wolves); when a fire breaks out, Gandalf summons the giant eagles, who agree to take the group to the Carrock, where they stay with the shape-shifter Beorn.

Gandalf reveals that he must leave Bilbo and the dwarves as they begin the next stage of their quest through the dangerous Mirkwood forest. Despite Gandalf and Beorn's advice to stay

on the path at all costs, Bilbo and the dwarves are lured off the path by the sight of wood-elves eating a feast. When the group is then captured by giant spiders, Bilbo uses his ring to free himself, kill many spiders, and free the dwarves; unfortunately, angry wood-elves capture and imprison them all, except for Bilbo who is still invisible, shortly thereafter. Bilbo uses his ring to free his friends from their cells and transports them out of the forest via barrels, which the elves use to send wine in trade down the river to the human town of Lake-town.

Bilbo and the dwarves arrive in Lake-town, where they're welcomed as heroes who will vanquish the dragon, Smaug, and bring prosperity to the cities of men once again. They travel to the Lonely Mountain, where the last ray of sunshine on the dwarf New Year reveals the keyhole to a secret passageway. Bilbo alone is brave enough to enter the mountain, and manages to sneak into Smaug's lair and steal a cup from the pile of treasure. Smaug is enraged. Later Bilbo sneaks again into Smaug's lair, but this time Smaug is only pretending to sleep: Bilbo speaks to Smaug in riddles, saying that he is a barrel-rider and learning in the process that Smaug has a weak point on his belly. Bilbo later gives this information to the dwarves, and to a talking thrush who overhears them. Smaug, during that same conversation, poisons Bilbo's mind with suspicion that the dwarves will not uphold their promise to give him one-fourteen of the treasure; when he raises his doubts to Thorin, Thorin insists that Bilbo can take whatever fourteenth of the treasure he wants. Bilbo secretly takes the Arkenstone, the most beautiful jewel in the dwarves' treasure.

Interpreting Bilbo's self-given name of "barrel-rider" to mean that he has been sent by men, Smaug flies to Lake-town and devastates it. But as he does so, an archer named Bard, a descendant of the Lord of Dale (a city that used to thrive as a hub of trade of dwarven gold and crafts before Smaug arrived), learns from the thrush about Smaug's weak point, and uses the information to shoot and kill him with a black arrow that had long been in Bard's family line. News of Smaug's death spreads across Middle Earth, and the men led by Bard ally with the wood-elves and march to the Lonely Mountain to claim some of the treasure, as repayment for the destruction Smaug leveled against them. Thorin refuses these requests, and it seems fighting between men, elves, and dwarves is imminent. Eager to end this conflict, Bilbo secretly gives the Arkenstone to Bard and the elves; when Bilbo admits what he's done, Thorin expels him from the Lonely Mountain. Bilbo reunites with Gandalf, who has returned from his other business.

Thorin summons his cousin, Dain, to help him defend their regained city and treasure. At the same time, goblins and wolves ride to the Lonely Mountain, eager to avenge the Great Goblin's death. Gandalf encourages men, dwarves, and elves to form an alliance, and at the Battle of the Five Armies, they unite against the goblins and wolves, defeating them with the help of Beorn and the Eagles. Bilbo uses his ring to hide during the

fight. When he meets up with the survivors of the battle, he finds that Thorin has been fatally wounded. Thorin tells Bilbo that he regrets expelling him. Bilbo returns to hobbit-town with two chests of treasure (having given up the claim to the even larger one-fourteenth that had originally been promised to him), enough to make him a wealthy man. A year later, he's visited by Gandalf and one of the dwarves, Balin, who tell him that Bard is now the master of Lake-town, goblins have been largely killed off, and dwarves, elves, and men now coexist peacefully.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Bilbo Baggins – The protagonist of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo initially seems content with his peaceful life in hobbit-town, but Tolkien hints that he secretly desires adventure and excitement (as is his birthright from his notoriously adventurous grandfather Old Took). Over the course of the novel, Bilbo journeys to the Lonely Mountain with the dwarves, and discovers his talents for riddling, fighting, and burgling, and even finds a magical **ring** of invisibility, even as he continues to wish for his home. In the end, he learns to balance his love for peace and tranquility with heroism and adventurousness.

Gandalf – The old wizard who recruits Bilbo for a quest, Gandalf is enormously wise, resourceful, and helpful to the dwarves during their journey to the Lonely Mountain, frequently saving their lives. At the same time, he can be neglectful, leaving the group outside Mirkwood forest when they most need him. It's possible that Gandalf deliberately places Bilbo and the dwarves in danger, in order to encourage them to fight for themselves and develop their skills and independence.

Thorin Oakenshield – The leader of the thirteen dwarves journeying to the Lonely Mountain. Thorin is the descendant of the King Under the Mountain who lost his throne when Smaug came and ousted the dwarves from their home. He has great bravery and integrity, but his love for the treasure that was stolen from him and his people leads him behave stubbornly and selfishly even after he has won it back.

Smaug – A dragon who heard of the treasure amassed by the dwarves of The Kingdom Under the Mountain and then proceeded to attack and expel the dwarves from their former home, desolating the nearby city of men, Dale, in the process. Smaug is clever and exceedingly greedy. Like all the other greedy characters in the novel, Smaug is also solitary, and spends much of his time sleeping on his treasure. The loss of even a single item of treasure sends him into a rage. He is adept at spreading distrust among others, and his sly words do cause Bilbo to lose some trust in Thorin and the dwarves promises. Smaug is also vain, and it is his vanity that allows Bilbo to

discover his weak point.

The Elvenking – The leader of the wood-elves, who imprisons Thorin and the dwarves and later marches to the Lonely Mountain to claim a part of the treasure after Smaug's death (the elves have long believed that the dwarves stole some of that treasure from the elves, though the dwarves believe the elves stole treasure from the dwarves).

MINOR CHARACTERS

Dain – Thorin's cousin, who leads an army of dwarves and eventually succeeds Thorin.

The Master – The corrupt, manipulative leader of Lake-town, who seeks only to prolong his own power for as long as possible.

Gollum – A disgusting, treacherous, and yet pitiful and lonely creature who is obsessed with the **ring**, and trades riddles with Bilbo.

The Great Goblin – Leader of the goblins who capture the dwarves in the Misty Mountains. He is killed by Gandalf.

Elrond – The elf-lord of the elves at Rivendell, and an ally to Gandalf and the dwarves. He reveals the history of the swords that Gandalf and Thorin take from the troll's treasure-hole, and also reads the moon-writing on the map to the Lonely Mountain.

William, Bert, and Tom – Three dim-witted trolls who capture the dwarves.

Beorn – A friend of Gandalf's, capable of turning into a bear, and a hater of goblins.

Oin – One of the thirteen dwarves marching to the Lonely Mountain. Good at making fire.

Gloin – One of the thirteen dwarves marching to the Lonely Mountain, also good at making fire.

Fili – One of the thirteen dwarves marching to the Lonely Mountain. The younger brother of Thorin.

Kili – One of the thirteen dwarves marching to the Lonely Mountain. The younger brother of Thorin.

Dwalin – One of the thirteen dwarves marching to the Lonely Mountain.

Balin – One of the thirteen dwarves marching to the Lonely Mountain. One of Thorin's companions on the day Smaug claimed the Lonely Mountain, and a good friend to Bilbo.

Bifur – One of the thirteen dwarves marching to the Lonely Mountain.

Bofur – One of the thirteen dwarves marching to the Lonely Mountain.

Bombur – One of the thirteen dwarves marching to the Lonely Mountain, very fat and lazy.

Dori – One of the thirteen dwarves marching to the Lonely Mountain. Holds Bilbo on his back.

Ori – One of the thirteen dwarves marching to the Lonely Mountain.

Lord of the Eagles – The leader of a flock of giant eagles, he and his fellow eagles save Bilbo and the dwarves from the goblins, and later join the side of the men, elves, and dwarves against the goblins and wargs at the end of the Battle of the Five Armies.

Thrush – A magical bird that indicates the entrance to Smaug’s lair to the dwarves, and later, after overhearing Bilbo reveal Smaug’s weak spot, tells Bard about how to kill Smaug.

Rac – An old raven who communicates messages from Thorin to Dain.

Bard – The archer who kills Smaug, and a descendant of the rulers of the Dale. After Smaug’s death Bard becomes a leader once more, and eventually becomes the new Lord of Dale.

Radagast – Gandalf’s cousin, a wizard and an acquaintance of Beorn.

Bolg – The goblin who leads an army to the Battle of the Five Armies after the Great Goblin’s death.

example of this phenomenon occurs when Bilbo falls off of Dori’s shoulders, and must out-riddle Gollum and out-manuever the goblins to escape from the **Misty Mountains**. The contrast between the way Bilbo enters the mountains (on someone’s shoulders) and the way he leaves them (on his own, with a **ring** of invisibility to help him) couldn’t be clearer: his experiences force him to become stronger, more independent, more powerful—to grow up. Later, when giant spiders capture Bilbo in Mirkwood forest, he adds other skills to his resume, using his sword to kill spiders and skillfully springing the dwarves from prison. By the time Bilbo reaches the Lonely Mountain, he’s brave enough to sneak in Smaug’s lair while the other dwarves hang back. Travel and danger have encouraged him to develop his bravery and cunning—skills of which he shows dim signs when Gandalf approaches him at the beginning of the novel.

Yet, while Bilbo matures throughout *The Hobbit*, he doesn’t entirely reject the life he made for himself before he met Gandalf. Late in the novel, he’s still regretting leaving his hobbit-hole in the first place, and when the dwarves succeed in winning their treasure and defeating Smaug, he wants to return to hobbit-town. Bilbo grows up, but he doesn’t forget where he comes from—a fitting message coming from *The Hobbit*, a children’s book that people read long after they’ve grown up.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



COMING OF AGE

Although Bilbo Baggins is “fully grown” at the beginning of *The Hobbit*, his adventures teach him to be brave, to take responsibility for himself and for others, and to develop skills he didn’t know he had: in effect, to grow up. When Gandalf and the dwarves approach Bilbo with an offer to be their burglar, Bilbo is so satisfied with his life and his home that the mere thought of adventure is enough to irritate and even frighten him. Yet Tolkien gives clues that Bilbo, deep down, wants to go on quests after all: he’s a descendant of the famously adventurous Took family, and seems to have inherited some of the Took’s love for maps and quests. While Bilbo never explicitly says that he wants to go with the dwarves to the Lonely Mountain (he merely rushes after them, prodded by Gandalf), it’s likely that he secretly, even subconsciously, wants to join them, realizing his inner potential for adventure. Along the way to the Lonely Mountains, Bilbo is placed in countless situations where he cannot rely on anyone else, and must learn to take care of himself. A particularly illuminating



THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

During *The Hobbit*, Bilbo, Gandalf, and the dwarves confront countless dangers: spiders, goblins, wood-elves, wolves, a dragon, etc. To defend themselves, they use an equally vast number of weapons: knives, daggers, spells, fire, rocks, sticks. Yet one of the most important weapons that they use—and one of the most important skills Bilbo develops on his travels—is language. In the early chapters of the book, Bilbo exhibits almost no sophisticated command of language, staying largely silent while the dwarves and Gandalf discuss their plans to journey to the Lonely Mountain and reclaim their treasure. When he gets lost under the **Misty Mountains**, he’s forced to use words to compete with Gollum, telling increasingly complicated riddles. While this episode is important in Bilbo’s growth as a manipulator of language, it’s important to recognize that he’s still a novice—he only defeats Gollum by asking a “cheap” question, “What have I got in my pocket?”, not by exhibiting any real creativity or skill with words. When giant spiders capture Bilbo and the dwarves in Mirkwood forest, Bilbo finally begins to use language with more skill, improvising elaborate songs to confuse the spiders and lure them away from the dwarves so that Bilbo can free them. After his exploits, Bilbo uses language to dub his sword **Sting**, a name that strikes fear into the hearts of the spiders. Bilbo uses language in a similar fashion when he confronts Smaug—instead of introducing himself as Bilbo Baggins, he calls himself a barrel-rider, a clue-finder, etc. Where before

Bilbo renames his sword, here he renames himself.

In *The Hobbit*, language is a weapon, capable of intimidating, confusing, and otherwise disarming one's enemies. But perhaps even more importantly, language is a tool for changing and understanding oneself. It's no coincidence that Bilbo renames himself as he becomes braver and more confident: with the power of naming, he makes his experiences a part of his personality—he doesn't just describe himself, he *changes* himself.



GREED, TRUST, FELLOWSHIP

Virtually every one of *The Hobbit's* primary characters—including both the heroes and the villains—is at least partially motivated by a desire

for unnecessary material things. Smaug, the primary antagonist of the novel, is so greedy that he notices when Bilbo steals a single cup from his vast collection of treasure. (Tolkien notes that his anger is that of a rich man who's lost something he never uses.) The dwarves are struggling to reclaim what is rightfully theirs from Smaug, but when they succeed in their quest, it becomes clear that their love for treasure is almost as obsessive as Smaug's—notably, they refuse to use their riches to repair the town Smaug destroys, even though it is during its destruction that Bard kills Smaug, guaranteeing the dwarves their wealth. Similarly, the wood-elves who imprison Thorin and the other dwarves believe that they have a claim to some of the dwarves' treasure. Tolkien doesn't bother to clarify whether the dwarves or the elves are correct in this dispute—the point is that both sides are flawed by their greedy, irrational desire for things they don't need. Even Bilbo, who is largely indifferent to the dwarves' talk of glory and riches, shows occasional flashes of greed. Under the Misty Mountains, he pockets Gollum's **ring** without thinking twice about it, and later takes the Arkenstone for himself because he's afraid that the dwarves won't honor their promise to give him one-fourteen of their treasure. (It's also worth keeping in mind that Bilbo and dwarves are constantly in want of food, and when they eat, they eat huge feasts—while this isn't greed per se, it does suggest that it's natural to want things, and perhaps to want more than one needs.)

If everyone is at least a little greedy, Tolkien seems to say, then the best they can do is try to limit their nature with reason and self-control. Bilbo may be the best example of how to overcome greed—though Thorin offers him one-fourteenth of the dwarves' treasure in return for his services, he's satisfied to take back a smaller portion, reasoning that it's enough to keep him satisfied for the rest of his life. Similarly, the dwarves, elves, and men ultimately overcome their greed by uniting together to defeat the wolves and goblins. On his deathbed, Thorin seems to renounce his former greed, saying that he's now traveling to a place (presumably, the afterlife) where this is no gold or treasure. Greed, then, is ultimately futile—compromise

and personal sacrifice are more important for maintaining peace and building mutual prosperity (as is evident in the fact that back before Smaug the communities of Dale, the Kingdom under the Mountain, and the elves of Mirkwood traded together and developed prosperity and mutual connection by doing so). In fact, the novel seems to place greed in direct contrast to trust and cooperation, and every overwhelmingly greedy character lives in almost complete isolation: Smaug, Gollum, and, for a time near the end of the novel, Thorin. Looked at on a larger scale, the races of dwarves, men, and elves are also separated by greed and the mistrust sown by greed. It is only after the attacking armies of the dwarves force the dwarves, elves, and men to band together in fellowship against this common enemy that they are able to rebuild their communities and attain their former prosperity.



HEROISM

The Hobbit is a fantasy novel, and it contains many of the genre's traditional tropes: a quest, treasure, a dark forest, and even a dragon. With this in mind,

it's worth asking who the hero—arguably the most important fantasy trope—of *The Hobbit*, and how Tolkien defines heroism. Bilbo Baggins is the protagonist of *The Hobbit*, meaning that he's the default hero. In the early chapters of the book, Bilbo is cowardly and reluctant to participate in the dwarves' quest. Ironically, this makes Bilbo seem more heroic than ever—the “reluctant hero” is an old literary archetype (Moses and King Arthur are classic examples.). Also in these early chapters, Tolkien submits one possible definition of a hero: a larger-than-life person who excels at combat. Bilbo's memories of his ancient ancestor, a hobbit who slew a goblin, suggest that this is how Bilbo, if not Tolkien, thinks of heroism.

Tolkien complicates this definition of heroism, however, as the story goes on. Heroism requires skill in combat, but also bravery, cleverness, and a talent for words. Characters who excel at only one of these things—Gollum, who excels at wordplay, the dwarves, who excel at combat, etc.—tend to fail in their aims; for instance, the dwarves are captured by spiders, their skill with swords useless. Although Bilbo is hardly a hero at the start of the book, he finds that he has many of the skills required for heroism as he and the dwarves travel to the Lonely Mountain. Ultimately, Bilbo develops a talent for both wordplay—he trades riddles with Gollum—and bravery—he alone is courageous enough to sneak into the Lonely Mountain while Smaug lives there. While he also shows some talent for combat, killing the spiders in Mirkwood forest, it's clear that Bilbo is not a great warrior—indeed, he largely hides during the Battle of the Five Armies.

There seems to be no single character in *The Hobbit* who excels at every skill required to complete a quest. Bard, the archer who kills Smaug and goes on to lead the people of Esgaroth, excels at bravery and combat, but while he also shows some

talent for words during his negotiations with Thorin, it's difficult to imagine him riddling his way out of the Misty Mountains, tricking Smaug into revealing his weak point, talking his way into Beorn's house, etc. Ultimately, the question of what makes a hero, or who best exemplifies heroism is less important to Tolkien than describing how characters cooperate with each other to fight evil and accomplish their goals. Thus, both Bilbo and Bard kill Smaug: Bilbo determines how to kill Smaug, and Bard uses the information to do the deed. It may be true that no single person is heroic in every sense of the word; thus, only when characters work together (as dwarves, elves, and men do in the Battle of the Five Armies) do their achievements become truly heroic.



HOME AND BIRTHRIGHT

The desire and love for a home motivates most of the main characters in *The Hobbit*. Sometimes, the characters' desires for home contradict each other.

For instance, Bilbo Baggins says at many points throughout his journey that he regrets ever leaving his home in hobbit-town, while the dwarves with whom he's embarking on his adventure seek to return to (and reclaim from Smaug) their home under the Lonely Mountain. In many cases, having home means having a claim to some position or material wealth. Thus, Thorin, the descendant of many dwarf kings, has a claim to his ancestors' treasure, which lies under the Lonely Mountain; similarly, Bard, the descendant of the lords of Dale, can claim lordship of Dale as his birthright.

But having a birthright isn't only a privilege—it's a duty. To have a home, one must also be a fair and generous "host," treating one's guests, subjects, and property with respect. Most of the antagonists in *The Hobbit*—the three trolls, the goblins, Gollum—are ungracious hosts who refuse to entertain Bilbo and the dwarves during their long quest. Some of the other antagonists, such as the Master and Smaug, play the part of a good hosts but are actually doing so for the wrong reasons, like the Master (who's trying to stay in power by manipulating the crowd), or trying to lure travelers into a false sense of security, like Smaug (who tells Bilbo to take what he wants of the treasure). Yet even the dwarves become ungracious hosts once they regain their treasure and their home under the Lonely Mountain, refusing to help the wood-elves or the men whose town Smaug has destroyed. Thorin even becomes ungracious to his own subjects, condemning Bilbo and the twelve other dwarves to starve during a siege. As a result, Bilbo leaves the dwarves, and a war breaks out between men, elves, and dwarves. The desire for a home is a universal human feeling, so we sympathize with Bilbo and the dwarves because they feel this desire particularly strongly. But sometimes, this desire becomes too powerful, and leads the characters, such as the dwarves, to be ungracious hosts and overprotective of their home—to make of their home something to be owned rather

than shared.

In the end, Tolkien implies, having a home means loving it, but not too much. Bilbo is a good model for how to regard one's home—he loves his hobbit-hole, but he's willing to invite others into it and to travel far away from it, too. Bard provides a good example of how to treat one's birthright. Unlike the Master, he doesn't exploit his position as the lord of Dale; on the contrary, he fights to feed and shelter his people, eventually bringing great prosperity to the town.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE RING

Without a doubt, the most famous symbol in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* books is the **ring** itself, which first appears in *The Hobbit* when Bilbo finds it under the **Misty Mountains**, just before he meets Gollum. There are rings in earlier epic stories that Tolkien would have been aware of, the most famous being the ring in Richard Wagner's four-part opera, the *Ring Cycle*—itself based on the Medieval epic poem the *Nibelungenlied*, in which two of the characters find a ring and fight to the death for it. In *The Hobbit*, as in these earlier works, the ring symbolizes the corruption of wealth and power. Gollum lives a miserable existence under the mountains; though he once lived above ground in the sun, it seems as if he has journeyed underground to be alone with his "precious" ring. (There's lots of other evidence for the corrupting influence of wealth and power in *The Hobbit*, such as Thorin's jealous obsession with the Arkenstone.) Bilbo, by contrast, seems relatively uninterested in treasure or power of any kind; perhaps because he is "innocent" in this sense, he can wear the ring without being consumed by jealousy or vanity.



THE MISTY MOUNTAINS

There is an old rule in adventure stories, from *The Odyssey* to *Star Wars*, that the hero's personal growth must be accompanied by a journey underground. After Bilbo falls off Dori's shoulders while fleeing from the goblins, he's forced to fend for himself as he tries to find his way out of the **Misty Mountains**. In doing so, he has to confront Gollum and goblins, and discovers talents he didn't know he had—deception, path-finding, riddle-telling, etc. Thus, the Misty Mountains represent Bilbo's maturation as a character and an adventurer: when he enters them, he's still immature (literally being carried on someone else's back!), but when he leaves, he's confident enough to navigate his own way around.



STING

Bilbo finds a dagger in the trolls' lair, which is small for the trolls, but large enough to serve as a sword for him. Later, when Bilbo is rescuing his friends from the spiders in Mirkwood forest, he renames this sword **Sting**. It's no coincidence that Bilbo gives his weapon a name at the same time that he's discovering his own aptitude for adventure, deception, and fighting. In effect, Bilbo "renames" himself in the second half of *The Hobbit* — he goes from thinking of himself as a well-to-do, adventure-phobic hobbit to a bold, daring adventurer (when he talks to Smaug, he even gives himself new names). Thus, Sting symbolizes Bilbo's changing nature, and proves that ordinary things — a dagger or a hobbit — are full of surprises.





QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Ballantine Books edition of *The Hobbit* published in 2012.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ This is a story of how a Baggins had an adventure, found himself doing and saying things altogether unexpected.

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

In this early quotation from the book, Tolkien establishes the basic plot: the protagonist, whose name is Baggins, will go out into the world and discover that he's capable of doing and saying new, exciting things. The quotation is written in a simple, almost fairy tale-like style ("This is a story"). But although the quotation might seem simplistic, it establishes an important and complex theme of the novel: the relationship between external travel and internal change. Baggins will travel a great distance in order to have his adventure. And yet the *real* adventure will occur within him: as he encounters new people and places, Baggins will discover new things about himself.

☞ As they sang the hobbit felt the love of beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic moving through him, a fierce and jealous love, the desire of the hearts of dwarves. Then something Tookish woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walkingstick.

He looked out of the window. The stars were out in a dark sky above the trees. He thought of the jewels of the dwarves shining in dark caverns.

Suddenly in the wood beyond The Water a flame leapt up — probably somebody lighting a wood-fire-and he thought of plundering dragons settling on his quiet Hill and kindling it all to flames. He shuddered; and very quickly he was plain Mr. Baggins of Bag-End, Under-Hill, again.

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins, Smaug

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 15-16

Explanation and Analysis

In this early scene, Bilbo invites a group of dwarves, led by the wizard Gandalf, into his home. The dwarves begin dancing and singing about their ancestral treasures—beautiful objects made from gold and jewels. As Bilbo listens to the songs, he feels a deep stirring of desire to go out into the world and explore the unknown. But suddenly, Bilbo feels a flash of fear, and abruptly stops fantasizing about adventure.

The quotation is important because it establishes that Bilbo has the *potential* to be a great adventurer, even if he's untrained. As Tolkien puts it, Bilbo has a trace of the "Tooks"—his wilder, more adventurous ancestors—in him. More generally though, he discovers here that he does have a secret desire to go off on adventures, a desire that few in his peaceful, complacent community would support. The passage also suggests how fear and routine act as barriers to happiness and curiosity. Bilbo might *desire* to explore the world, but right now he's too afraid of danger to translate his desire into reality.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ The master of the house was an elf-friend—one of those people whose fathers came into the strange stories before the beginning of History, the wars of the evil goblins and the elves and the first men in the North. In those days of our tale there were still some people who had both elves and heroes of the North for ancestors, and Elrond the master of the house was their chief. He was as noble and as fair in face as an elf-lord, as strong as a warrior, as wise as a wizard, as venerable as a king of dwarves, and as kind as summer. He comes into many tales, but his part in the story of Bilbo's great adventure is only a small one, though important, as you will see, if we ever get to the end of it.

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins, Elrond

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 51



Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Tolkien describes Elrond, the master of the Elves. Elrond is wise, extremely old, and noble. He gives shelter to the dwarves and Bilbo on their way to Smaug, proving that he is a good, respectable person. Moreover, Elrond's presence in this scene provides evidence that Bilbo's story, while important, is only one insignificant part of the history of Middle Earth—the fictional universe in which Tolkien's novels are set. As Tolkien writes, Elrond is unimportant in Bilbo's tale, although he's enormously important in some of the other tales of Middle Earth (as Tolkien makes clear in his other works). Tolkien's observation reinforces the vastness and complexity of his novel: it's as if Bilbo, as he ventures farther and farther from his home, is becoming gradually more and more aware of the world's size and scope. In short, Bilbo is constantly discovering more about his world, and his encounter with Elrond is a milestone in the path of discovery.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ The goblins were very rough, and pinched unmercifully, and chuckled and laughed in their horrible stony voices; and Bilbo was more unhappy even than when the troll had picked him up by his toes. He wished again and again for his nice bright hobbit-hole. Not for the last time.

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis



Bilbo and the dwarves stumble into a cave where they're attacked and arrested by goblins: the cruel, violent inhabitants of the underground world. At this early point in the novel, Bilbo is still uncertain about his role as an ally and friend to the dwarves. While he's excited to go off on adventures, he's still so used to his life as a hobbit that when danger strikes, his first reaction is to pine for his hobbit-hole—a womb-like place where everything was uneventful and complacent, but also warm and safe.


Bilbo's love for his home undergoes many changes during this novel. In this quotation, Bilbo's love for home eclipses his love for adventure. He's still an "armchair adventurer"—someone who has vague fantasies of exploring the unknown, but doesn't know how to go about doing so, and who finds himself longing for home when the adventure turns dangerous.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ "Both wrong," cried Bilbo very much relieved; and he jumped at once to his feet, put his back to the nearest wall, and held out his little sword. He knew, of course, that the riddlegame was sacred and of immense antiquity, and even wicked creatures were afraid to cheat when they played at it. But he felt he could not trust this slimy thing to keep any promise at a pinch. Any excuse would do for him to slide out of it. And after all that last question had not been a genuine riddle according to the ancient laws.

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins (speaker), Gollum

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Bilbo, who is trapped beneath the Misty Mountains, exchanges riddles with Gollum, a frightening, mysterious cave-dweller. Although Bilbo and Gollum have almost nothing in common (or so they think), they do abide by a common set of rules: they believe in the importance of words and language. As a result, the game of riddles they

play with one another has a "sacred" side to it. Gollum promises to show Bilbo the way out of the mountains if Bilbo can stump him; now that Bilbo has won the game, Gollum is "bound" to honor his agreement.

And yet as the passage makes clear, language can be twisted and manipulated to suit people's needs. Here, Bilbo is afraid that his victory in the game of riddles isn't binding, at least not in the sacred, "ancient" sense. Based on the passage, it's clear that Gollum is dangerous to Bilbo, and moreover, his dangerousness is closely related to his refusal to keep his word. In the world of Middle Earth, honor and honesty are of the utmost importance; no creature who breaks his word can be "good."



In the absence of rules—the rules of riddle-telling, in this case—Bilbo must learn to depend on a new set of skills; namely, his abilities with a sword. Thrown into danger, Bilbo is forced to master the art of language, and then, when language fails him, he's forced to resort to physical fighting. Because it proves that he's a versatile, multi-talented person, Bilbo's interaction with Gollum represents a milestone in his journey to becoming a hero.


●● Bilbo almost stopped breathing, and went stiff himself. He was desperate.

He must get away, out of this horrible darkness, while he had any strength left. He must fight. He must stab the foul thing, put its eyes out, kill it.

It meant to kill him. No, not a fair fight. He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword. Gollum had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried to yet. And he was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo's heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking and whispering.

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins, Gollum

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 86-87

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Bilbo contemplates killing Gollum, whom he knows to be dangerous, but then hesitates. Without warning, Bilbo feels a sudden burst of sympathy for Gollum, a creature who's forced to live a hard, lonely life under the mountain. It's because of his sympathy that Bilbo decides to

spare Gollum's life.


Bilbo's behavior indicates that he's becoming a more confident, mature adventurer; moreover, it suggests some important things about heroism in general. Only a few chapters ago, it would have been easy to imagine Bilbo panicking and striking Gollum with his sword out of fear. The fact that Bilbo hesitates suggests that he's become calmer and more clear-thinking; he's growing used to the life of adventure. More generally, though, Bilbo's behavior reminds us that heroism is about being merciful and gentle as much as it is about physical prowess and bravery. At times, heroes are forced to kill their opponents, but only in self-defense. As he journeys through the mountains, Bilbo learns a lot about fighting and survival, but he never allows these "lessons" to interfere with his decency or mercy.

Chapter 6 Quotes

●● He crept still nearer, and suddenly he saw peering between two big boulders a head with a red hood on: it was Balin doing look-out. He could have clapped and shouted for joy, but he did not. He had still got the ring on, for fear of meeting something unexpected and unpleasant, and he saw that Balin was looking straight at him without noticing him. "I will give them all a surprise," he thought, as he crawled into the bushes at the edge of the dell.

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins, Balin

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bilbo shows a penchant for theatricality and mischief that he hadn't often displayed before. Having made his way out of the Misty Mountains, Bilbo stumbles upon his fellow travelers, the dwarves. Instead of immediately greeting them, he decides to surprise them. By choosing to surprise the dwarves, Bilbo displays his "machismo" and panache; he makes it clear that he's not dependent on the dwarves in any way, but rather that he can come and go as he pleases.



In a broader context, Bilbo's behavior marks an important turning point for the novel. Bilbo has survived a terrifying adventure in the Misty Mountains, and more importantly, he's survived on his own, without the help of Gandalf or the dwarves (but with the help of the magic Ring). Invigorated

by his success, Bilbo begins to genuinely enjoy the thrills of exploring new places. His enjoyment is palpable in this scene—after braving Gollum and the goblins, he's not the least bit frightened, and decides to keep his secret weapon (the Ring) a secret in order to surprise his friends.

Chapter 7 Quotes

●● Mr. Baggins saw then how clever Gandalf had been. The interruptions had really made Beorn more interested in the story, and the story had kept him from sending the dwarves off at once like suspicious beggars. He never invited people into his house, if he could help it. He had very few friends and they lived a good way away; and he never invited more than a couple of these to his house at a time. Now he had got fifteen strangers sitting in his porch!

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins, Gandalf, Beorn

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Bilbo watches as the wizard, Gandalf, tricks a powerful man named Beorn into letting a large number of dwarves into his home. Gandalf tells Beorn a colorful tale, which Beorn is too interested in to ignore entirely. As Gandalf tells Beorn this tale, he mentions dwarves, and they enter one or two at a time. Because of his interest in the story, Beorn has no choice but to let the dwarves into his house, despite his dislike of visitors.

Gandalf's tactics are a good example of how the characters in the novel use language as well as physical force to get their way. At various points in the book, characters obtain food and shelter and even save their own lives by telling interesting stories. Furthermore, the scene illustrates the basic "tit for tat" of hosting and hospitality in Middle Earth. On many occasions, one character will seek lodgings from another. In order to "pay" for his lodgings, the character will sometimes tell an entertaining story, just as Gandalf does here. In *The Hobbit*, the most villainous characters are often the worst hosts (the goblins, Gollum, Smaug, etc.). Therefore, the fact that Beorn is reluctant to take in the dwarves but does so anyway clues us into his being a grumpy but basically trustworthy character.

Chapter 8 Quotes

●● He looked at the 'black emperors' for a long time, and enjoyed the feel of the breeze in his hair and on his face; but at length the cries of the dwarves, who were now simply stamping with impatience down below, reminded him of his real business. It was no good. Gaze as much as he might, he could see no end to the trees and the leaves in any direction. His heart, that had been lightened by the sight of the sun and the feel of the wind, sank back into his toes: there was no food to go back to down below.

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis


In this quotation, Bilbo and the dwarves are trying to make their way through the dark, dangerous Mirkwood Forest. Unable to determine which way to go, they send Bilbo to climb a tree. Bilbo climbs up past the thick layers of branches and leaves, and is surprised to find that (beyond the forest) it's bright and sunny. Bilbo is exhilarated by the sun, but feels depressed once again when he's forced to climb down to the ground.

Bilbo's behavior in this scene illustrates that he's halfway through his personal transformation. After many adventures across Middle Earth, Bilbo is becoming more comfortable with the role of adventurer. And yet there are many moments—such as this one—in which he feels a longing to escape back home: to forget about his promise to journey to Smaug's lair with the dwarves. Bilbo's desire to escape back to his hobbit-hole isn't as clear-cut as it was in the earlier chapters, suggesting that he's now caught between total nostalgia for home and total commitment to the quest. By now Bilbo is still partly a complacent armchair adventurer and partly a real hero.

●● Somehow the killing of the giant spider, all alone by himself in the dark without the help of the wizard or the dwarves or of anyone else, made a great difference to Mr. Baggins. He felt a different person, and much fiercer and bolder in spite of an empty stomach, as he wiped his sword on the grass and put it back into its sheath. "I will give you a name," he said to it, "and I shall call you Sting."

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 156

Explanation and Analysis

In this important scene, Bilbo kills a giant spider, using the sword he acquired during the course of his earlier adventures. Standing over his defeated opponent, Bilbo feels like a new hobbit: braver, stronger, and more independent than ever before.

It's important to note that although Bilbo has owned his small sword for some time now, it's only now that he chooses to give it a name. Bilbo's decision to name his sword reflects his emergence as a full-fledged hero: a brave, intelligent warrior who defends his friends (in this scene, the dwarves, who have been captured) from evil. Previously, Bilbo had the *potential* to become a bold adventurer (just as his sword had the potential to kill), but now his potential has become a reality, as reflected by his new sense of courage. Bilbo seems to be naming his sword, but he might as well be rechristening himself: he's a hero now.

Chapter 10 Quotes



☞ He had never thought that the dwarves would actually dare to approach Smaug, but believed they were frauds who would sooner or later be discovered and be turned out.

He was wrong. Thorin, of course, was really the grandson of the King under the Mountain, and there is no knowing what a dwarf will not dare and do for revenge or the recovery of his own. But the Master was not sorry at all to let them go. They were expensive to keep, and their arrival had turned things into a long holiday in which business was at a standstill.

"Let them go and bother Smaug, and see how he welcomes them!" he thought.

"Certainly, O Thorin Thrain's son Thror's son!" was what he said. "You must claim your own. The hour is at hand, spoken of old. What help we can offer shall be yours, and we trust to your gratitude when your kingdom is regained."

Related Characters: The Master (speaker), Thorin Oakenshield, Smaug

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 200

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, the Master—the temporary leader of the men of Lake-town (the area near Smaug's lair)—deals with Thorin and the other dwarves. The dwarves have come to the Master's territory to ask for supplies with which to scale the mountain and defeat Smaug. The Master is amazed that the dwarves are actually going to attempt to kill Smaug, and because the Master himself is a rather cowardly liar, he naturally assumes that Thorin and his followers are liars, too, and that they're just in town for the free food and lodgings the townspeople have offered them.

The passage is amusing because of the way it juxtaposes the Master's thoughts—crass, petty, and greedy—and his words, which are grandiose and comically eloquent. Like many of the villains in the novel, the Master maintains his power by manipulating language, using speeches to convince the townspeople that he is their proper leader, and saying certain things even when he secretly believes the exact opposite. In general, the passage establishes a contrast between Thorin's noble dedication to his quest and the Master's opportunism. Tolkien reminds us who the real heroes of his story are, just before they go off to fight Smaug.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☞ "If you mean you think it is my job to go into the secret passage first, O Thorin Thrain's son Oakenshield, may your beard grow ever longer," he said crossly, "say so at once and have done! I might refuse. I have got you out of two messes already, which were hardly in the original bargain, so that I am, I think, already owed some reward. But 'third time pays for all' as my father used to say, and somehow I don't think I shall refuse. Perhaps I have begun to trust my luck more than I used to in the old days" - he meant last spring before he left his own house, but it seemed centuries ago - "but anyway I think I will go and have a peep at once and get it over. Now who is coming with me?" He did not expect a chorus of volunteers, so he was not disappointed.

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins (speaker), Thorin Oakenshield

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 212-213


Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bilbo Baggins is surprised to learn that Thorin and the other dwarves intend for him to sneak into Smaug's cave alone, in order to explore the area. Bilbo knows full-well that this is a dangerous mission, suggesting that the dwarves aren't as brave as they presented themselves to be. In spite of his annoyance, Bilbo decides to explore the cave, anyway.

Bilbo's behavior in this scene reminds readers how much he's changed in only a few months; the mention of the "old days" illustrates that Bilbo thinks of his old life in the hobbit-hole as a distant memory. Moreover, the passage shows readers that Bilbo both is and isn't the hero of the novel. On one hand, Bilbo has become exceptionally brave in a short period of time: he's learned how to fight and talk his way out of almost any situation. (Although he's reluctant to enter the cave by himself, it's not because he's particularly frightened.) And yet Bilbo also isn't a typical hero at all: he can be sarcastic and irritable, reminding the dwarves of their cowardice in a rather petty way, and much of his "bravery" stems from the fact that he secretly possesses a magic ring of invisibility. Perhaps the passage is meant to suggest that the people whom one thinks of as traditionally heroic—like Thorin Oakenshield, with his gravitas and ancestral ties to the land—are rarely as brave as they seem, while those who don't appear particularly heroic, such as Bilbo, are often stronger and braver than they appear.

☞ There it is: dwarves are not heroes, but calculating folk with a great idea of the value of money; some are tricky and treacherous and pretty bad lots; some are not, but are decent enough people like Thorin and Company, if you don't expect too much.

Related Characters: Thorin Oakenshield

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Tolkien as narrator establishes some important information about dwarves: they're greedy and not particularly heroic. In other words, they're overly focused on their material possessions (their gold, treasure, etc.), to the point where they don't necessarily do the right thing. In the coming chapters, Tolkien will provide ample evidence of the fact that dwarves are too greedy: he'll show how Thorin and his followers nearly start a war because they refuse to share their gold with others. The interesting

thing about this quotation is that it arrives so late in the novel. By this point, we've known Thorin and his followers for many pages, and yet it's only now that we're seeing their true colors (or at least their true colors as the narrator portrays them). As Bilbo becomes more heroic and self-reliant, he has an easier time seeing through Thorin's bluster; i.e., seeing him for the person he truly is. By the same token, Tolkien begins to portray Thorin as increasingly un-heroic in certain regards, contrasting Bilbo's bravery and complex view of morality with Thorin's childish greed.

☞ "I am the clue-finder, the web-cutter, the stinging fly. I as chosen for the lucky number."

"Lovely titles!" sneered the dragon. "But lucky numbers don't always come off."

"I am he that buries his friends alive and drowns them and draws them alive again from the water. I came from the end of a bag, but no bag went over me."

"These don't sound so creditable," scoffed Smaug.

"I am the friend of bears and the guest of eagles. I am Ringwinner and Luckwearer; and I am Barrel-rider," went on Bilbo beginning to be pleased with his riddling.

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins (speaker), Smaug

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis

Bilbo has snuck into the dragon Smaug's lair. There, he toys with Smaug, identifying himself with a series of clever nicknames that allude to his impressive exploits across Middle Earth. Bilbo's behavior in this passage suggests a number of things about his progress as a hero and an adventurer. By this point in the novel, Bilbo has had some significant experiences as an adventurer--and he knows it. Impressed with his own bravery and resourcefulness, Bilbo sings his own praises, giving himself epithets like those in Classical poems like Homer's *Odyssey*.



At the same time, Smaug's reaction makes us wonder if Bilbo's self-satisfaction has any point, or if Bilbo is in fact becoming overly confident and arrogant. Unlike Bilbo's clever wordplay with the spiders or with Gollum, his speech in this scene doesn't help him in any discernible way: it doesn't confuse or frighten Smaug, and his phrase "Barrel-rider" even inspires Smaug to attack Lake-town. So although Bilbo's behavior here proves how far he's come in the novel, Tolkien is also setting Bilbo up for a defeat connected to his

own hubris (pride as a fatal flaw). Indeed, in the final few chapters of the novel, Bilbo's actions will prove largely futile, and he'll be reminded of his own smallness and weakness.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☝☝ "Now I am a burglar indeed!" thought he. "But I suppose I must tell the dwarves about it sometime. They did say I could pick and choose my own share; and I think I would choose this, if they took all the rest!" All the same he had an uncomfortable feeling that the picking and choosing had not really been meant to include this marvelous gem, and that trouble would yet come of it.

Related Characters: Thorin Oakenshield

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 237

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bilbo finds the Arkenstone—the most beautiful, valuable part of the dwarves' treasure—and makes the difficult decision to keep it for himself, without telling the dwarves about it. Bilbo knows that the dwarves have promised him a fair share of the treasure, which he's free to choose as he sees fit. Nevertheless, he knows that he's not really supposed to choose the Arkenstone—it's crucial to Thorin's idea of his "birthright," for one—so Bilbo instinctively feels guilty and keeps his action a secret.



Bilbo's decision in this passage represents one of the first times in the novel when he truly violates an agreement with his allies, the dwarves. In the past, Bilbo has toyed with the dwarves out of exasperation or frustration, but it's not until this moment that he goes behind their backs altogether.

Bilbo has finally been seduced by the spectacle of wealth (he's like Gollum, jealously obsessed with the ring). In other words, Bilbo is falling into the same trap as the dwarves themselves—valuing objects more highly than his relationships with his friends.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ As you see, the Master had not got his position for nothing. The result of his words was that for the moment the people quite forgot their idea of a new king, and turned their angry thoughts towards Thorin and his company. Wild and bitter words were shouted from many sides; and some of those who had before sung the old songs loudest, were now heard as loudly crying that the dwarves had stirred the dragon up against them deliberately!

Related Characters: The Master, Smaug

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 253

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Tolkien describes how the Master of Lake-town manipulates his followers. The Master knows that if the dwarves can defeat Smaug and reclaim their rule of his mountain, the Master's own position as a leader will be in danger. In order to maintain the current order, then, the Master riles up his people, convincing them that they should be fighting *against* Thorin and his dwarves instead of welcoming them as returning rulers (as many had earlier). This shows how fickle a crowd can be in its sense of loyalty, as many of those men who had praised Thorin as king now consider him an enemy. But it also is another example of the power of language in the novel; more than almost any other character, the Master excels at using language and speech to control others and get what he wants. The difference between the Master and the other characters who excel at language (like Bilbo or Gandalf) is that the Master uses his gifts to support his own selfish needs, while the other characters often use it to help their friends or simply to escape danger.

In general, the passage is also a good piece of evidence for what Tolkien does—and doesn't—consider heroic. While there are many characters in the novel who excel at fighting or language, only a handful excel at both, and even fewer use these skills for unselfish reasons. Gandalf and Bilbo, and few others, exemplify this particular kind of heroism, while characters like Thorin are in murkier territory, and the Master is an example of someone who uses his skills only to help himself.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☝☝ Bilbo thought that Thorin would at once admit what justice was in them. He did not, of course, expect that any one would remember that it was he who discovered all by himself the dragon's weak spot; and that was just as well, for no one ever did. But also he did not reckon with the power that gold has upon which a dragon has long brooded, nor with dwarvish hearts. Long hours in the past days Thorin had spent in the treasury, and the lust of it was heavy on him. Though he had hunted chiefly for the Arkenstone, yet he had an eye for many another wonderful thing that was lying there, about which were wound old memories of the labors and the sorrows of his race.

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins, Thorin Oakenshield, Smaug

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 265



Explanation and Analysis

Here Thorin shows his true colors, and muddies Tolkien's definition of what a true hero is. Although Bilbo has helped the dwarves reclaim their treasure in dozens of different ways (saving their lives; finding out how to defeat Smaug; sneaking into Smaug's lair), Thorin is remarkably ungrateful for Bilbo's contributions. As Tolkien explains it, Thorin is too greedy for his treasure to listen to reason: he's too obsessed with possessions to hand any of them over to Bilbo. Thorin's behavior here reminds us of how one's connection to a home or other particular place can be a barrier to heroism and virtue. Thorin feels a deep, ancestral tie to his treasure—it's partly because of this ancestral bond (and righteous sense of victimhood, as this home and birthright was stolen from him) that he feels perfectly justified in treating Bilbo badly. Although Bilbo seems to feel an equally profound connection to his hobbit-hole, he doesn't let this connection interfere with his heroism. But Thorin is also dealing with forces and a history Bilbo doesn't have to face, and Tolkien further draws an implicit comparison between Thorin's lust and possessiveness regarding his ancestral treasure, and Bilbo's regarding his Ring.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☛☛ "Misery me! I have heard songs of many battles, and I have always understood that defeat may be glorious. It seems very uncomfortable, not to say distressing. I wish I was well out of it."

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

Near the end of his adventures with the dwarves, Bilbo has a sudden change of heart. After hundreds of pages, during which he's come to truly enjoy the daredevil thrills of adventure, Bilbo decides that he's had enough of danger and violence. Bilbo has heard from books and songs that war is a noble thing, but up-close, he finds that it's anything but. (In real life, Tolkien fought in some of the bloodiest battles

of World War I, and critics have often interpreted this passage as Tolkien's gloss on his own experiences as a soldier.)

In a broader sense, the passage suggests that Bilbo is sick of being a hero and an adventurer. While he's enjoyed himself at many points in his quest, he's also come to see that many of the things he associated with glorious heroism, such as battle and treasure, actually cause more suffering than they're worth. Largely for this reason, Bilbo decides to turn his back on the world of quests and treasure. While he gains some material wealth as a result of his travels, his most valuable "takeaway" is the newfound courage he acquires over the course of the novel—courage that outstrips that of the dwarves who roped him into adventuring in the first place.

Chapter 18 Quotes

☛☛ From that treasure Bard sent much gold to the Master of Lake-town; and he rewarded his followers and friends freely. To the Elvenking he gave the emeralds of Girion, such jewels as he most loved, which Dain had restored to him. To Bilbo he said: "This treasure is as much yours as it is mine; though old agreements cannot stand, since so many have a claim in its winning and defense. Yet even though you were willing to lay aside all your claim, I should wish that the words of Thorin, of which he repented, should not prove true: that we should give you little. I would reward you most richly of all." "Very kind of you," said Bilbo. "But really it is a relief to me. How on earth should I have got all that treasure home without war and murder all along the way, I don't know. And I don't know what I should have done with it when I got home. I am sure it is better in your hands."

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins, Bard (speaker), Dain, The Elvenking

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 293

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bilbo and Bard—the brave leader who slays Smaug—discuss the future of the treasure that the dwarves have claimed for themselves. Bard is now a leader of the men, and has been charged with distributing the share of gold that Thorin, on his deathbed, bequeathed to him. As Bard discusses his decisions with Bilbo, it becomes clear that he and Bilbo are rather similar, and are two of the most "heroic" characters in the novel. They're both modest, intelligent, and fairly uninterested in material wealth.

(Unlike Thorin, Bard leads his followers without selfishly claiming a "right" to treasure—on the contrary, he gives away large quantities of treasure, and says that he would like to give even more to Bilbo.) Both Bard and Bilbo also feel a strong connection to a particular place: Bard to his hometown, and Bilbo to his hobbit-hole.

But where Bard's connection to a place leads him to become a leader, Bilbo's nostalgia for home draws him away from adventure and back to a life of peaceful complacency. As Bilbo explains here, he wants to return to his hobbit-hole, and has no real interest in treasure anymore. Bilbo has received something more valuable than treasure: an unforgettable experience.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☛☛ "Then the prophecies of the old songs have turned out to be true, after a fashion!" said Bilbo.
"Of course!" said Gandalf. "And why should not they prove true? Surely you don't disbelieve the prophecies, because you had a hand in bringing them about yourself? You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit? You are a very fine person, Mr. Baggins, and I am very fond of you; but you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!"
"Thank goodness!" said Bilbo laughing, and handed him the tobacco-jar.

Related Characters: Bilbo Baggins, Gandalf (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 305

Explanation and Analysis

Years after Bilbo's adventures in Middle Earth, he's back in his hobbit-hole, and gets a surprise visit from Gandalf the wizard. Gandalf suggests to Bilbo that he was being "helped" through his adventures by powerful, invisible forces. (At various points in the novel, it's suggested that these "forces" are simply fate, the gods of Middle Earth, or even Gandalf himself.) Surprisingly, Bilbo doesn't dispute Gandalf's suggestion at all—he acknowledges that he's simply not that strong and independent, and is "only quite a little fellow in a wide world."

It's especially surprising that Bilbo agrees with Gandalf's statement since he's admitting that he's not really much of a "hero" in the end. Bilbo has proven himself to be a capable, intelligent adventurer. And yet Bilbo ultimately comes to reject the world of traditional heroism—the world of treasure, battle, and centuries-long feuding. In spite of his talents, he washes his hands of adventure, and retires. And yet Bilbo's adventures with Gandalf and Thorin haven't been for nothing. On the contrary, his adventures have made him a more confident, capable hobbit, with a wealth of wisdom and experience.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

The narrator begins by describing the hole in the ground beneath a hill, in which a particular hobbit lives. The hole is highly comfortable: it has bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens, and dining rooms for entertaining the hobbit's many visitors. The best rooms in the house have a view of the garden outside the hobbit's home. Locals refer to the area as The Hill, located in hobbit-town.

The hobbit's name is Baggins, and he belongs to a well-to-do family of hobbits that never gets involved in adventure. The narrator notes that *The Hobbit* is the story of how Baggins became involved in an adventure and lost some of his neighbors' respect. The narrator will leave it up to the reader to decide whether Baggins gained anything from his adventure.

The narrator turns to describing hobbits. Hobbits are small creatures that resemble dwarves, except without beards. They have no magical powers except for their ability to hide, especially from humans, who are loud and clumsy. Hobbits love to laugh and eat, and they wear bright clothing.

The first paragraph of The Hobbit is a surprise to read, because Tolkien doesn't begin by describing what a hobbit is—he begins by describing the hole. This is a clever strategy for immersing readers in the fictional world of the book: the hole Tolkien describes is actually a fairly ordinary-sounding home, comfortable and clean. In this way, we see the world of The Hobbit as both fantastical (populated with strange creatures we've never heard of) and familiar (full of cozy homes). It's also important to note that the best rooms in this hobbit's home—presumably the ones the hobbit itself prefers—have windows. The hobbit enjoys comfort and security, but it also longs for the exterior world, and, perhaps, for travel and adventure.



Tolkien narrates The Hobbit in a third-person omniscient voice; this creates a tone of reassurance that Bilbo will survive his dangerous adventures. Nevertheless, the narrator doesn't explain whether or not Bilbo has "gained" anything—this focuses the reader on most important part of the story, Bilbo's personal transformation.



Tolkien simultaneously distinguishes hobbits from people, who he playfully criticizes for being big and loud, and compares hobbits with people, noting their love for food, their sense of humor, etc. Again, Hobbits are established as both fantastic and "normal", in the sense of being like the normal, non-heroic, non-adventurous, everyday people likely to be reading the book.



Bilbo Baggins, the Baggins about whom *The Hobbit* is written, is the child of the hobbit Belladonna Took, who was herself the daughter of the famous Old Took. The Tookes were rumored to be distantly related to fairies, and they were said to go on adventures occasionally. Belladonna Took never went on adventures; instead, she married Bungo Baggins, who used Belladonna's mother's money to build the hobbit-hole where Bilbo lives. At the time when the story begins, Bilbo is fully grown—about fifty years old—and looks and behaves exactly like his father, though he seems to have inherited some qualities from his Took ancestors.

One morning, Bilbo is sitting outside his home smoking, when Gandalf passes by. Gandalf, an old man who wears a grey cloak and carries a staff, is famous among hobbits. He was friends with Old Took, but hasn't been by The Hill since Took's death. Bilbo doesn't recognize Gandalf, but greets him; Gandalf tells Bilbo that he is looking for someone to accompany him on an adventure. Bilbo refuses, saying that hobbits don't take part in adventures, and pretends to ignore Gandalf. Gandalf then introduces himself to Bilbo, who is impressed, having heard stories about how Gandalf would bring quiet young people on adventures.

Gandalf tells Bilbo that he will give him what he has asked for; when Bilbo says that he hasn't asked for anything, Gandalf says that, in fact, he's asked for it twice. Bilbo, rattled and a little afraid, invites Gandalf to tea tomorrow, and immediately goes inside his home, thinking that Gandalf is a powerful wizard, and that he'll have to be careful. Gandalf is amused by Bilbo's behavior, and marks Bilbo's door with a strange sign before he leaves.

The next day, Bilbo has almost forgotten about tea. So he's surprised to hear a knock at his door and find a dwarf, who introduces himself as Dwalin, standing outside his home. Bilbo is flustered, but invites Dwalin inside for tea. A little later, he hears another knock on the door, and finds another dwarf, Balin—Dwalin's brother. Again, he invites Balin in. In this manner, he lets a total of thirteen dwarves into his house: Dwalin, Balin, Fili, Kili, Dori, Ori, Oin, Gloin, Bifur, Bofur, Bombur, who's very fat, and Thorin Oakenshield, who is haughty. Gandalf arrives along with the last four dwarves. All thirteen dwarves, except for Thorin, who's too important to join in, ask for food and sing songs about ruining Bilbo's home, though they actually treat it with great care.

Tolkien's suggestion that, despite Bilbo's apparent comfort, he has some yearning for adventure is connected to his ancestors. Tolkien makes similar connections for other characters later in the book, and often sees character traits and even destinies as a kind of "birthright" that can be passed down without the person receiving them even really knowing it. It's important to note that Bilbo is supposed to be "fully grown" when the story begins—in fact, he will change greatly during the story, and, in effect, grow up. Perhaps the point is that it's never too late to become a different person, and that adventure is a means of discovering things about yourself you didn't know.



Bilbo, revealing his dual nature, is both attracted to and repelled by Gandalf's promises of adventure. He knows that Gandalf brings innocent people like himself on quests and tries to avoid him, and yet he doesn't simply turn Gandalf away. This suggests that, deep down, Bilbo wants to go on precisely this kind of quest, even if he's too peaceful and satisfied with his life to admit it (to others or to himself).



Gandalf seems to sense (and perhaps knew before even meeting Bilbo) that Bilbo secretly wants to go on an adventure, but can't admit it. Bilbo's invitation to Gandalf further suggests that he's at least a little attracted to his offers of adventure. Gandalf also proves himself to be adept at manipulating language and signs—drawing a complex figure on Bilbo's door—while Bilbo stumbles over his words.



*There is very little characterization of the twelve dwarves other than Thorin. This sets the tone for *The Hobbit*, in which the group often acts as a single entity. Thorin's sense of honor verging on haughtiness is established here and remains important through the book. The dwarves' boisterous singing and play along with the actual respect they pay to Bilbo's home establishes them as fun-loving and disorderly but also as having a deep sense of honor and respect. The scene also portrays how to be both a good host and a good guest. The host trusts and is generous with his guests; the guests enjoy themselves but are also careful with the host and his home.*



The dwarves play music and sing of the dwarves of the past, who lived in a great hall beneath a mountain, where they mined gold and jewels. A dragon attacked the dwarves and drove them from their home, and now they must quest to reclaim their home and their treasure. As Bilbo hears this song, he's momentarily filled with a desire to go on adventures, but this desire disappears soon after the music ends.

Song is an important means of communication in Tolkien's book—it allows a group of people to share the same stories and keep memories of the past alive. Bilbo's reaction to the song implies again his secret yearning for adventure. The dwarves' tale marks them as a group that has had their home, and wealth, stolen from them. Now the stakes begin to be set: Bilbo has a home with which he is content (both his hole and his life among Hobbits), but the dwarves are without a home, without their birthright, and must go on an adventurous quest to get it back and the implication is that Bilbo could choose to leave his own home to go on the quest.



Thorin rises from his seat and praises Bilbo, who he calls the dwarves' co-conspirator, for his hospitality. He alludes to a great adventure on which Bilbo is to accompany the dwarves, and comments that Bilbo may never return. Bilbo is so shocked by this that he screams and faints. When Bilbo is revived, he overhears the dwarves wondering whether Bilbo, who they call a "little fellow" is capable of adventures. Bilbo indignantly says that he is capable of anything, an outburst that he is later to regret. The dwarves inform him that there was a sign on his door claiming that he is a burglar looking for employment; Gandalf reveals that it was he who wrote this sign, but that the dwarves should accept Bilbo as their co-conspirator.

At this point in the narrative, Bilbo is shy and timid, hardly the adventurer he will eventually become. Instead of actively choosing to participate in the quest, he's forced to so by Gandalf, who manipulates language to fool the dwarves into treating Bilbo as their burglar. Nevertheless, Bilbo shows some signs that he wants to be part of the adventure—he angrily insists that he isn't afraid. For the time being, though, Gandalf controls Bilbo's fate, not Bilbo himself.



Gandalf produces a map, which he tells Thorin belonged to Thrór, Thorin's grandfather. The map shows a hall beneath a mountain, marked with the symbol of a red dragon. Gandalf explains that there is a secret passageway into the mountain, which is too small for a dragon to use itself. He had attempted to recruit warriors for the dwarves' expedition, but found that warriors were too busy fighting, and for this reason chose a burglar, Bilbo. He also gives Thorin the key to the secret passageway.

*Gandalf acts as a source of history and useful information for the dwarves during their quest. His discussion of the relative merits of warriors and burglars is a clue to the kind of heroism he believes in. Where others favor violence and strength, Gandalf seems to have more respect for cunning and cleverness. Gandalf's motives in *The Hobbit* are never entirely clear—why is he helping the dwarves? Why does he seem so interested to include Bilbo?—though they are revealed more in Tolkien's later *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.*



Bilbo, who loves maps, asks for an explanation of the dwarves' quest. Thorin explains that the fourteen dwarves in Bilbo's house were the dwarves in their song. His grandfather, Thrór, was King under the Mountain—King of a vast Dwarf city under the Lonely Mountain—and his subjects' skill as miners and craftsmen brought trade, wealth, and prosperity to the surrounding area, and led also to the establishment of a large town for men, the Dale, which served as a hub of trade. A dragon, Smaug, heard about the dwarves' wealth, and drove them from their home, keeping the treasure for itself.

Bilbo's love of maps again suggests his yearning for adventure (though it also displays at this point a love of adventure contained within a very domestic world: Bilbo likes to imagine faraway lands from the safe comfort of his home). Thorin's description of his family's history sheds light on the interaction between the different peoples of Middle Earth, an important theme later in the novel: the homes of the dwarves and of men are interdependent.



Bilbo suggests that the dwarves go to the Mountain and try to reclaim their treasure, and offers to fix them breakfast before they leave. Thorin implies that Bilbo will be going with them, and, without waiting for an answer, asks Bilbo to fix him eggs for breakfast. The other dwarves ask for similar food and go to bed. As Bilbo falls asleep, he hears Thorin humming the dwarves' song. He has vivid, unusual dreams that night, and wakes up late.

Bilbo falls short of personally volunteering for the dwarves' quest to the Lonely Mountain, but he continues to show signs that he's secretly attracted to this quest. It's as if Bilbo's coming of age—from a passive homeowner to an active adventurer—can only be achieved if someone else—in this case, Gandalf—gives him a strong nudge.



CHAPTER 2: ROAST MUTTON

Bilbo jumps out of bed in the morning and goes into his kitchen, where he sees the huge number of plates and glasses the dwarves used last night. This sight depresses him, since he can't easily forget that the dwarves were in his home. Gandalf greets him, and points to a note the dwarves have left him. The note says that Bilbo will act as a burglar for the dwarves, that in return he will receive one-fourteenth of the treasure, and that he must meet them at the Green Dragon Tavern at eleven o'clock sharp, which Bilbo realizes is in only ten minutes. Bilbo protests, but Gandalf urges him to hurry there, and he leaves his home without a hat, coat, or walking stick.

Bilbo's dual nature – his love of comfort alongside his yearning for adventure – are again on display here. It is interesting that what he initially wishes is not dislike of the dwarves or adventure but a wish to forget all about it. It is as if his “domestic side” is seeking to repress his “adventurous side. Yet all it takes is a little push from Gandalf and he is off and running. The fact that he forgets his hat and cloak symbolizes the other, less tangible baggage he's leaving behind—his comfort, his peacefulness, his safety, etc.



At the Green Dragon, the dwarves greet Bilbo, and tell him that they must be going and that he can borrow a hat and coat. The group, which includes Gandalf riding on a white horse, leaves the hobbit-lands in which Bilbo lives, and soon ventures into areas where the people speak strange languages, and the buildings look sinister. Bilbo wishes, for not the last time, that he were at home.

The physical changes in the landscape that accompany the group's traveling reflect Bilbo's state of mind: a gloomy landscape signals a gloomy mind. This establishes a pattern that will continue throughout The Hobbit, whereby the external environment matches the characters' internal thoughts and feelings.



While the group is traveling through the wilderness, it begins to rain, and the group notices that Gandalf is missing. The dwarves are unable to make fire, and a horse runs away, leaving them with little food for the evening. They see a faint light in the distance, and decide to send Bilbo to investigate what it is, giving him a complicated signaling system if he's in danger. Bilbo finds that the source of the light is a campfire, around which sit three huge trolls, Tom, Bert, and William, complaining about eating the same meal, mutton, night after night. Bilbo, who knows from reading various books that the trolls are probably carrying valuable things in their pockets, picks Williams's pocket, thinking excitedly that this is the beginning of his career as a burglar. Unfortunately, William's enchanted purse lets out a yell when Bilbo holds it, and William captures Bilbo.

Gandalf disappears for the first, but not the last time in the novel. It's never explicitly clear if Gandalf vanishes accidentally, or deliberately. In either event, the encounter with the trolls is important because during it, Bilbo shows his first signs of enjoying burglary, and enjoying his adventures. He depends upon knowledge he's learned in books—trolls have lots of treasure. This suggests that Bilbo is better prepared for his journey than he lets on, though it also signals that his knowledge is entirely of the book-learning kind and not at all from experience. And, indeed, inexperienced as he is, Bilbo makes a mistake and gets captured.



The trolls ask Bilbo if there are others near their fire; Bilbo says yes at first, then no. William, who's already eaten supper, wants to let Bilbo go, but the other two trolls want to eat him. The trolls begin to fight, and Bilbo is able to slip away in the confusion. Meanwhile, the dwarves have begun to approach the fire. When the trolls see the dwarves, they capture all of them and put them in sacks, while Bilbo hides nearby, afraid to move.

While the three trolls are deciding how to kill and eat the dwarves, a mysterious stranger's voice is heard. The stranger mimics the voices of the three trolls, causing an argument that goes on for so long that the sun rises, turning the trolls to stone instantly. The stranger, who turns out to be Gandalf, frees the dwarves from their sacks, and Bilbo comes out of his hiding place. Gandalf suggests that they explore the trolls' underground treasure room, and Bilbo produces a key he's found on the ground while he was hiding. Gandalf uses the key to open the treasure room, where Gandalf and Thorin find two excellent swords, and Bilbo finds a knife that, while small for a troll, is large enough to serve as his sword.

Thorin asks Gandalf how he became separated from the rest of the group. Gandalf says that he had ridden ahead to Rivendell to inquire about provisions and lodgings for the dwarves, but when he looked behind him he noticed that the dwarves weren't there. He tells Thorin that he must be more careful in the future.

CHAPTER 3: A SHORT REST

The weather improves, but the dwarves don't sing or laugh; they've begun to feel the increasing danger and weight of their quest. Bilbo sees a great mountain in the distance, which belongs to the chain called the **Misty Mountains**. The group will have to cross the Misty Mountains before they arrive at their destination. He feels tired, and wishes, for not the last time, that he was back in his home.

The group travels to Rivendell, a city of elves located near a river valley, where Elrond the elf-lord will give them food and lodgings. The way to Rivendell is difficult, but when the group arrives, they're greeted by the sound of elves singing. Gandalf eagerly greets the elves, with whom he's friendly.

Bilbo continues to stumble over his words, changing his statement about whether he is alone in a painfully obvious way. For now, the dangers of the quest are relatively small—one of the trolls even wants to let Bilbo go. Even at this early point, though, Bilbo shows signs of being an adept burglar and adventurer: his small size allows him to escape from the trolls in their confusion. Yet Bilbo then does nothing to help the captured dwarves, instead he is so scared that he just hides.



No small part of Gandalf's power is verbal -- without using any force, he defeats the trolls, simply by saying the right things at the right time in the right way. Bilbo proves himself to be a decent burglar and a lucky finder-of-things, finding the key to the trolls' treasure, which proves to be very valuable. Bilbo also takes an important step in establishing his identity when he chooses a weapon for himself: this symbolizes the physical might he'll have to learn later on, and the increased freedom and maturity he's enjoying.



Gandalf's explanation isn't entirely convincing—though he claims he lost sight of the dwarves, it's entirely possible that he deliberately left them and Bilbo. If this is the case, it's likely that Gandalf left Bilbo on his own to encourage him to develop skills as a burglar—it's as if he threw Bilbo in the deep end of the pool to teach him to swim.



Bilbo continues to long for home, even after he begins to improve as a burglar and an adventurer. Yet his melancholy has the unintended effect of uniting him with the rest of his group—the other dwarves are feeling sad and tired, too, and they are even further from having a home. Bilbo wants to leave the group, but ironically, this feeling makes him a part of the group.



Rivendell represents the last safe place on the group's journey for a long time. That Rivendell is a safe place is made obvious by the elves' joyous singing. Note the elves' hospitality toward their guests.



The group stays in Rivendell for two largely uneventful weeks—Bilbo would have stayed much longer. Elrond, the elf-lord, examines the map that Gandalf gave to Thorin, and on it finds moon letters, which can only be read by the light of the moon: the message says that on Durin’s Day, the first day of the dwarves’ New Year, taking place between autumn and winter, the light of the setting sun will shine upon the keyhole to the secret passageway to Smaug’s lair. Elrond also reads the runes on the two swords Gandalf and Thorin found in the troll’s possession and reveals that they are famous goblin-killing weapons: Orcrist, the “goblin-cleaver” and Glamdring, the “Foe-hammer.”

In midsummer, the group leaves Rivendell and heads toward the **Misty Mountains**. The elves sing them songs as they depart.

While the dwarves stay in Rivendell for a long time, they accomplish relatively little, besides obtaining important information about how to enter the secret passageway. This suggests that peace, for all its intrinsic pleasures, isn’t terribly interesting, and suggests that adventures may be more fun, both for the people who participate in them and the readers who experience them indirectly. Meanwhile, Elrond’s mastery of language allows him to decipher the map. Also note how the fact that the swords have names give them a history and power they didn’t have as anonymous weapons. The swords, too, have a kind of birthright through their “heroic” actions. The history of the swords also establishes goblins as the “bad guys” of The Hobbit.



The elves sang their guests into Rivendell, and sing for their departure. The elves are good hosts, but their kindness again makes the comforts of the “home” of Rivendell stand in contrast to discomforts (even if exciting discomforts) of adventure, and also emphasizes how the elves have a home and the dwarves do not.



CHAPTER 4: OVER HILL AND UNDER HILL

The group walks through the **Misty Mountains**, and their path is difficult and dangerous. As they climb high up, they can see back to the West, back in the direction of Bilbo’s home, the Shire. Bilbo thinks longingly of the harvests taking place in the hobbit-lands.

Gandalf knows that the **Misty Mountains** have become full of danger in recent times, and that underneath them, in the Mines of Moria, there are goblins. One night, a thunderstorm breaks out, and the Mountain Giants throw rocks to each other for fun. Fili and Kili, the two youngest dwarves, find a cave that can provide shelter from the storm—Gandalf asks them if they’re sure the cave is empty, and though Fili and Kili have come back too quickly to be at all sure of this, they insist that it is. The group goes into the cave; Gandalf forbids them from lighting a fire. They rest.

Bilbo continues to think of his home. He’s connected to the land itself—to the rituals of harvesting—as much as he’s connected to specific people and places. But he has also traveled far, and can see his former home in a new way.



Gandalf’s questions about the emptiness of the cave foreshadow danger to come. That Fili and Kili insist the cave is empty attests to their own inexperience as adventurers but also for the urgent need of finding shelter—a temporary home—from the brutal force of nature embodied in the storm. Also, as readers, the story gives us enough detail to know that going into the cave is a bad decision and will lead to danger, but at the same time, we want them to get into trouble—we don’t want another series of uneventful weeks, as the dwarves just experiences in Rivendell. As readers, we have some of the same “dual nature” as Bilbo: longing for the characters safety, while also longing for them to have adventures.



In the middle of the night, Bilbo wakes up to a creaking sound, and sees a crack growing in the side of the cave, from which goblins emerge. Bilbo gives a cry, waking up Gandalf and allowing him to vanish in a flash of light that kills several goblins. The goblins seize the group's ponies, which they will later eat, and take everyone but Gandalf prisoner. Goblins, the narrator notes, are clever, evil creatures who bear Thorin's people a special grudge because of the wars they've fought with each other.

The goblins lead Bilbo and the dwarves to their leader, the Great Goblin. The Great Goblin asks Thorin to identify himself and explain why he's here; Thorin identifies himself, but lies and says that he and his group are visiting his relatives on the other side of the mountain. The goblins howl that Thorin is lying, and that he hasn't explained the bright flash of light that killed some of them. They also produce the sword Thorin found in the troll's treasure hole, which the Great Goblin immediately recognizes as Orcrist, or Biter, a famous sword that has killed hundreds of goblins.

The Great Goblin gives a howl of rage at the sight of Orcrist, but at this exact moment, the lights go out. A bright sword appears to float through the room, and kills the Great Goblin. A voice tells the dwarves to quickly follow it away from the goblins. As the dwarves run away, Gandalf lights his wand, revealing himself to be the bearer of the sword, which is called Glamdring the Foe-Hammer.

The dwarves run, but the goblins are faster, and Gandalf tells Thorin to turn and fight. Using Glamdring and Orcrist, Gandalf and Thorin kill many goblins, then turn back and continue running away. Bilbo thinks to himself that he was wrong to ever leave his hobbit-hole. Dori is carrying Bilbo on his back as they run from the goblins, but when a goblin tries to grab Dori, Bilbo rolls off his back and falls deep into a cavern, hits his head on a rock, and loses consciousness.

Bilbo isn't powerful or resourceful enough to fight the goblins, but he does demonstrate his value to the group by noticing them—Bilbo may not be a warrior, but he is alert and clever. The narrator establishes a long-running conflict between dwarves and goblins—a history or “birthright” of war—which will continue to be important in the rest of the book.



Thorin doesn't lie and give a false name to the Goblin King—it's as if he's too proud to conceal his identity, even as he refuses to reveal the purpose of his travels. Thorin is a warrior, and he acts according to a warrior's code of honor, but without all that much cleverness. In this section, Bilbo begins to get a sense for battle and violence—not only the people who participate in them, but the trophies and relics of battle, such as Orcrist.



At this point, Gandalf's powers are more obviously magical—he can extinguish light, see in the dark, etc. He also excels at old-fashioned sword-fighting, and kills the Great Goblin with apparent ease. In this way, we begin to see the full extent of Gandalf's abilities: he uses words, weapons, and magic with equal skill.



In the midst of the first big danger the group faces, Bilbo is too inexperienced to be of much use—in fact, he's so useless that Dori carries him on his back like a child. In moments such as this, Bilbo wishes he were back at home, demonstrating how unprepared he is for the challenges of adventure.



CHAPTER 5: RIDDLES IN THE DARK

Bilbo wakes up and finds himself alone in a cold, dark cave. He finds a small **ring** on the ground, and puts it in his pocket almost without thinking. Though he doesn't know it at the time, this is a turning point in his life. He looks in his pockets for a pipe or tobacco, but finds nothing, though under his coat he finds the knife he took from the trolls. He realizes that it's been made by elves, since it glows when goblins are nearby. Thinking that it's a great thing to own an old, beautiful weapon, he resolves to go forward, though he's afraid.

Bilbo is in a "tight place," the narrator notes, but he has the advantage of being used to living underground in holes. Bilbo walks for a long time, until he's very tired. Eventually, when his sword is barely glowing at all, he comes to a cold, slimy pool.

A small, slimy creature called Gollum lives by the pool. Gollum hides from the goblins, though he eats goblin when he can get it, and also eats fish. He paddles through the water in a small boat, and notices Bilbo before Bilbo notices him. Gollum thinks that Bilbo, who's clearly not a goblin, would make a good meal.

Bilbo becomes aware of Gollum and, frightened, points his sword at him. Gollum, who always talks to himself, asks what Bilbo is; Bilbo replies that he's a hobbit. Gollum shifts his plan when he realizes that Bilbo is armed. Rather than attack, he asks Bilbo to stay a while and tell riddles, as he remembers doing years ago, when he lived in the sun and had friends. Gollum tells Bilbo an easy riddle, and when Bilbo answers it, Gollum suggests that they have a competition: if Gollum can stump Bilbo, he eats Bilbo; if Bilbo can stump Gollum, Gollum will show Bilbo the way out of the cave. Bilbo is too afraid to disagree with these terms.

Events have caused Bilbo to be alone, forcing him to begin to take control of his life: he resolves to move forward with his weapon instead of cowering in the dark. That his weapon has an elven-made history and he, as holder of the sword, inherits that history, also gives him a sense of security. The ring he finds, apparently by accident, will indeed be important to his success—in retrospect, this suggests that successful adventuring isn't always due to the individual's abilities. Sometimes luck—or fate—is equally, if not more important. Yet the way he finds the ring mirrors the way he finds the keys to the Troll treasure. Bilbo seems to be someone who happens to find things. And, of course, it being treasure, he pockets it: Bilbo is not immune to greed for beautiful things like rings and beautiful swords.



Bilbo's experiences in his home prepare him well for his adventures here underground (which also functions as a way to connect him to establish the soon-to-be-introduced Gollum as a kind of double to Bilbo). He courageously continues to walk into the darkness.



The narrator makes it clear almost immediately that Gollum is a threat to Bilbo; and Gollum is clearly a very bad host, who is not at all generous with his "guest," Bilbo. Tolkien also more firmly establishes the doubling between Bilbo and Gollum by pointing out some similarities between them: both are obsessed with eating. It's as if Bilbo is confronting a darker version of himself.



Gollum lives in utter solitude— he lives on the exaggerated edge of the spectrum of someone who is so homebound that he never interacts with the world he never leaves his home, exemplified in the fact that he talks only to himself. Bilbo, in contrast, has left his home and interacted with the world. Note Bilbo's improved use of language as he engages in a high-stakes game of riddling. Once again, the immediate danger of the situation forces him to grow into something of a different person (or hobbit) than he was before.



Bilbo and Gollum tell each other a series of riddles. Bilbo's riddles have answers that reflect his life in hobbit-town: the sun, flowers, eggs, etc. Gollum tells riddles about the things he's most familiar with: the dark, fish, the wind, etc. Though Gollum and Bilbo have trouble guessing each other's riddles, they trade correct answers for four rounds without a winner. Finally, after Bilbo correctly answers Gollum's fifth question, the only question Bilbo can come up with is to ask Gollum what he, Bilbo, has in his pocket (the ring); Gollum asks for three guesses, but can't come up with the right answer, and thus loses the game. Bilbo knows that riddle-telling is an ancient, sacred art, and even Gollum won't break the rules they've agreed upon. Still, he's nervous around Gollum, since he won on a question that wasn't a proper riddle.

Gollum says that he'll show Bilbo the way out, but first he must paddle back to his lair and retrieve some things. Gollum actually intends to retrieve his **ring**, which makes him invisible, and use it to turn invisible and then kill Bilbo. The narrator says that no one knows how Gollum first found the ring, long ago, but that he wears it frequently, and uses it to catch his prey. But when Gollum goes back to his lair, he discovers that the ring is missing. He paddles back to Bilbo, and demands to know what Bilbo had in his pocket. Bilbo refuses to answer the question, and asks Gollum what he has lost, having heard him wailing earlier. Gollum refuses to answer Bilbo's question.

Gollum slips away, and Bilbo is afraid that he will attack and eat him. He slips on the **ring** without thinking, and then runs as he hears Gollum coming. He trips and falls while trying to run away from Gollum, but to his surprise, Gollum doesn't attack him, but runs past him. Bilbo hears Gollum talking to himself, saying that "the hobbit" must have Gollum's ring, and he must not escape with it, or the goblins will capture him, take the ring, and use it to kill Gollum. Gollum decides to head for the way out, in the event that Bilbo has gone that way, and ambush Bilbo there. Bilbo follows Gollum, realizing that the ring he wears must make him invisible.

Language is a powerful weapon—Gollum is literally using it to try to kill Bilbo, while Bilbo is using it to save his life. Language is also a reflection of a speaker's innermost thoughts and experiences: Bilbo's and Gollum's riddles reflect the kind of person each is and the experiences each has had. Language is also a sacred art, and both Bilbo and Gollum seem to abide by the rules of the riddle-telling game. It's worth bearing in mind, however, that Bilbo isn't yet a master of language—he quickly runs out of riddles to tell, and ends up asking Gollum such a casual question that it doesn't follow the sacred code of riddling, and thus puts Bilbo's life in danger.



Tolkien shows us that Gollum is evil because he breaks a verbal promise to show Bilbo the way out—though he claims he'll help Bilbo, he secretly wants to eat him. In a sense, Gollum is evil because he is a host so bad he wants to eat his guest. Yet the doubling between Bilbo and Gollum also intensifies here as it becomes clear to the reader (though not entirely to Bilbo) that Bilbo has actually inadvertently stolen Gollum's ring. Gollum's demand to know what's in Bilbo's pocket and Bilbo's refusal to reveal it is a kind of standoff of greed (which mirrors in a way the much larger standoff based on greed near the end of the book). It is important to recognize that Bilbo is not portrayed as totally good, here: he and Gollum share similarities.



Bilbo's survival in this section is almost completely accidental, not the product of his own ability or heroism. Even when Bilbo finds his way out, he doesn't do so because of his excellent sense of direction; he simply follows Gollum. In a way, Tolkien suggests, heroism is something of a myth—skill is necessary, but so is good fortune. Note how the ring—and each's need and desire for it—has become the center of the conflict between Bilbo and Gollum.



Gollum continues toward the way out, with Bilbo secretly following behind him. Though Gollum can't see Bilbo, he smells him in the dark. Bilbo is tempted to use his sword to kill Gollum, but he feels pity for him, and thinks to himself that Gollum is lonely, and, after all, hasn't actually threatened to kill him. So, instead, he jumps over Gollum, and rushes into the goblins' territory. Gollum tries to catch Bilbo, but is too slow, and stays back, cursing Bilbo's name.

Bilbo could easily kill Gollum, but he doesn't. In part, this is because he doesn't have all the information about Gollum—he doesn't know that Gollum was going to kill him—but just as much he spares Gollum's life because he's kind and sympathizes with the weak and pitiable. Bilbo is hardly perfect, and in fact, he's a thief who has stolen the ring, but at moments like this, it becomes clear that he's also a moral character. And this morality and kindness is as much of what establishes Bilbo as a hero in the story as any of his cunning exploits to come.



In the goblins' lair, the goblins see Bilbo—he has taken off his **ring**. Bilbo slips it back on just in time, and hides behind a barrel while the goblins try to find him. He sees an open door, and moves toward it, dodging goblins. He squeezes through a crack in the door, but his buttons get stuck. A goblin points out that there's a shadow near the door, as they near the door, Bilbo pulls himself through the door and out of the mountains, losing his buttons in the process—he has escaped.

The difference between Bilbo's interaction with the goblins here and in the last chapter is obvious—though Bilbo still doesn't fight them directly, he now has a powerful weapon for avoiding them and the willingness to take action on his own. Symbolically, Bilbo loses his buttons at the end of this chapter, in which he's changed so greatly. It's as if he's casting aside a final remnant of his old life, and turning to his adventure instead.



CHAPTER 6: OUT OF THE FRYING PAN AND INTO THE FIRE

Bilbo finds himself on the other side of the **Misty Mountains** without a pony, buttons, or his companions. He walks along the mountains for some time, and eventually hears voices that don't sound like goblins'. He is happy to find that they belong to the dwarves and Gandalf, but rather than greet them right away, he decides to have some fun, and puts on his **ring** and walks among them, invisible.

Here, Bilbo begins to enjoy himself for the first time on his journey. Instead of immediately rejoining the group, he asserts his independence by walking among them unnoticed. Bilbo's ring has changed his personality—he's braver and more adventurous than he was only a day before. And yet, his actions here are also somewhat unkind—his new power has made him at least slightly less sympathetic.



Gandalf is arguing with the dwarves; the dwarves are annoyed that Bilbo couldn't stay with them, and had to get himself lost, while Gandalf insists that they find Bilbo instead of going on. Bilbo removes his **ring** and seems to appear out of thin air, startling everyone, including Gandalf. The dwarves are highly impressed, and Bilbo's reputation as a burglar goes up considerably in their eyes. Bilbo doesn't show his ring to anyone, but simply says that he snuck past Balin, the sentry, very quietly. When asked about where he has been, Bilbo only says that he fell off of Dori's back and snuck past the goblins—Gandalf gives Bilbo a look as if he senses what Bilbo has left out. Gandalf explains that Bilbo's cry woke him up, and he was able to escape from the goblins himself by using his enchantments.

It becomes clear that the dwarves aren't at all loyal to their friend; indeed, this is an early clue that they're not particularly moral people, especially compared to Bilbo. Even so, the dwarves begin to respect Bilbo much more after he appears before them, seemingly out of thin air. This suggests that the dwarves are somewhat shallow—they respect Bilbo because he's a good burglar, not because he's a good person—but it also shows how greatly Bilbo has changed in a short time. It's also significant that Bilbo doesn't tell the dwarves everything about his journey—he begins to develop a private life: a sure sign of his growing maturity. Gandalf senses this growing private life, these secrets that Bilbo is keeping, but also perhaps the greed that is also a part of Bilbo not revealing everything that has happened to him.



The dwarves have lost their supplies and ponies to the goblins, but the company proceeds on their route. Bilbo is enormously hungry, and the path is difficult. After a long time, the group hears the sound of wolves, which Bilbo recognizes from a relative who used to imitate wolf howls to scare him. Bilbo, the dwarves, and Gandalf climb into trees to avoid the wolves. Bilbo is unable to climb up, but Dori climbs down and pulls him up just as a wolf is about to bite him.

The wolves are actually Wargs—wolves that can talk—and Gandalf overhears their conversation as they talk among themselves. They were supposed to meet the goblins there that night to raid a nearby town of men. The Wargs are “annoyed” to find that the goblins are late (Gandalf knows this is probably because of the death of the Great Goblin) and they’re equally angry to see that there are people in the trees, who they assume must be in cahoots with the men in the town. Gandalf, who’s scared despite being a wizard, takes the large pinecones growing in the trees, uses magic to set them on fire, and throws them down at the Wargs, who yelp and run away.

The Lord of the Eagles notices the commotion in his forest and summons other eagles to come with him and investigate. As they circle lower, they see a great crowd of wolves and goblins jeering at Gandalf and the dwarves in the trees. Gandalf, who’s now afraid that the fire he started will burn down the trees and kill the entire group, mocks the goblins, but also prepares to jump. Just as he is about to jump, the eagles arrive, snatching Gandalf and the dwarves out of the trees before they’re burned down. As an eagle carries Dori, Bilbo hangs on to Dori’s ankles, and lets go just as the eagles drop them in a nest.

The eagles are no friends of dwarves, but let them go because Gandalf is friendly with the Lord of the Eagles, having healed a wound the eagle had suffered many years ago. The eagles refuse to take the group anywhere near a city of men, since they’re afraid that men will shoot them with arrows, but Gandalf convinces them to take him and his friends much closer to their destination. Bilbo says that he is hungry, and the eagles bring the group hares, rabbits, and sheep to eat. Bilbo is too tired to help the dwarves prepare the food, but he eats it, and falls asleep. In his dreams, he walks through his home looking for something whose appearance or identity he can’t remember.

Again, Bilbo makes connections between the lessons he’s learned at home and his experiences on the road. Even after acquiring the ring, he’s unable to evade the wolves by himself -- he still depends in no small part on his companions for help.



Since we’ve seen the extent of Gandalf’s abilities by this point in the novel, that fact that he is scared adds tension to this moment. But even so, Tolkien lightens the moods by anthropomorphizing the wolves and describing their feelings in dry, understated language—it would be terrifying to read that the wolves are angry, but not that they’re “annoyed.”



The appearance of the Eagles is an example of deus ex machina—a sudden, unexpected resolution to a problem, which relies heavily on magic or the suspension of disbelief. Usually, this is frowned upon in fiction, because it takes readers out of the story and reminds them that they’re reading a work of fiction. Yet Tolkien counteracts these effects with lots of concrete details about Bilbo’s flight, such as the way he grips on to Dori’s legs. In this way, the scene becomes more satisfying as a work of fantasy.



Gandalf’s experience continues to prove valuable, since without his friendship with the Eagles, the group would never have been saved. Bilbo ends the chapter in an almost childlike state, too weak to help make dinner. His dream might symbolize the rapid changes he’s experienced recently. Though he continues to occasionally and almost reflexively miss his home, he’s gradually forgetting what he misses about it as he becomes more familiar with travel.



CHAPTER 7: QUEER LODGINGS

The eagles take Gandalf, Bilbo, and the dwarves to a far-away place with woods and a river. Bilbo is afraid to fly, but loosens his grip around his eagle's talons when the eagle tells him to do so. Bilbo will never see the eagles again, the narrator notes, except for during the Battle of the Five Armies, which will come much later in the story.

Gandalf now announces that he has other business to attend to, and must leave the dwarves in the near few days. The dwarves are sad to hear this, and offer Gandalf gold and jewels to stay, but Gandalf is insistent; he also comments that he believes he has already earned some of the dwarves' treasure already. He tells the group that he will take them to a place called the Carrock, where there lives a strange "Somebody," of whom they must not ask too many questions. This person, Gandalf tells Bilbo, is a shape-shifter, and sometimes assumes the shape of a bear. He adds that he will have to introduce this person to the group very gradually.

The group comes to the Carrock, and Gandalf leads Bilbo to the home of a man so huge that Bilbo can walk between his legs without his head touching the man's tunic. Gandalf introduces himself and Bilbo to the man, and mentions that the man might know Gandalf's cousin, Radagast. The man, Beorn, comments that Radagast isn't a bad sort, as wizards go, and asks Gandalf to explain how he has come to be here.

Gandalf tells Beorn that he has been traveling with a friend or two; Beorn asks where the other friend is, and Gandalf calls for Thorin and Dori. Beorn says that he doesn't like dwarves much, but since these dwarves have been fighting goblins, they're welcome to stay with him. Gandalf goes on describing his travels through Rivendell, the **Misty Mountains**, and the woods, each time mentioning a few more of the dwarves; each time, Beorn questions Gandalf's story, and Gandalf calls for a few more of the dwarves to come, until finally, Beorn has agreed to accommodate Bilbo and all of the dwarves. Bilbo is impressed that Gandalf has managed to convince Beorn to accommodate such a large group, especially since Beorn usually turns away visitors. Gandalf doesn't tell Beorn that the dwarves are looking for treasure.

The way Bilbo overcomes his initial fears demonstrates that he is beginning to grow more comfortable with his quest. This isn't to say that he isn't still terrified of the goblins and trolls he encounters; rather, it suggests that he's getting better at coping with fear.



Gandalf's sudden need to depart is a surprise, especially since he's proved himself to be extremely useful to the group, having saved them twice in the last few days. It's not entirely clear why Gandalf needs to leave so soon—it's possible that he has business to attend to, as he says, but it's also possible that he wants to test the dwarves and make Bilbo a better adventurer by exposing him to danger.



Gandalf is a master of words, spells, and fighting, but one of his most important skills is his experience, in and of itself. Gandalf knows a huge number of people, who he can ask to host him and his friends. Beorn proves himself to be a decent, if not an excellent, person insofar as he agrees to be a host.



Gandalf manipulates language to trick Beorn into housing all fourteen of them at the same time. In many ways, this is the same trick that he used to convince Bilbo to invite all of the dwarves into his house when he was expecting Gandalf. This is important in and of itself—Bilbo is no longer the object of trickery, but an observer of it: he's maturing. Gandalf continues to keep the goal of the dwarves' quest a secret, knowing that if the information were to become widely available, many others would try to take the dwarves' treasure. Greed abounds in the world.



Beorn leads the group into his hall, where he feeds them food and tells them tales of the dark forest, Mirkwood, through which Bilbo and the dwarves must soon travel. Beorn's story makes everyone feel nervous for the journey that lies ahead. That night, as Bilbo is falling asleep, he wonders if Beorn has transformed into a bear and intends to kill his guests, but he puts this thought out of his head and falls asleep.

The next morning, Bilbo finds Gandalf, who explains that he found bear tracks outside, leading toward the woods from which the eagles saved them. Beorn, in the shape of a bear, may have led other bears to this location. Bilbo is afraid that Beorn will lead the Wargs and goblins to them, but Gandalf urges Bilbo to calm himself; the next day, Beorn has returned, and says that he went to the woods to confirm Gandalf's story, and that he likes it better now that he knows it's true.

Beorn gives the dwarves provisions, including bows and arrows, and sends them off to Mirkwood with the advice that they mustn't leave the path for any reason, or wet their bodies with water from an enchanted stream. The dwarves are grateful to Beorn for his advice and hospitality, and set off toward Mirkwood. As they travel that night, Bilbo thinks that he sees the figure of a huge bear that might be Beorn, but Gandalf tells him not to pay attention to it.

The group reaches Mirkwood forest, and they let their ponies go as the ponies will not be able to travel through the forest. Gandalf announces that he is leaving them to attend to other business. Bilbo is especially sad to see Gandalf go, and wishes that he were going with him. Gandalf reminds Bilbo that there is no other way to reach the destination without traveling through Mirkwood; the only alternative would involve traveling near goblins or the Necromancer. Gandalf leaves Bilbo and the dwarves, reminding them not to go off the path. The group enters Mirkwood forest, and begins the most dangerous part of its journey.

CHAPTER 8: FLIES AND SPIDERS

Bilbo and the dwarves march in single-file through the forest along the path. They quickly come to hate the constant sight of cobwebs, and the almost total darkness in which they sleep every night. At night, Bilbo sees bright, glowing eyes looking at him, and thinks that these eyes must belong to insects, not animals.

Bilbo doesn't sleep well because he doesn't entirely trust Beorn. But this is only appropriate—Gandalf has withheld information from Beorn, meaning that Beorn has no particular reason to trust the group he's hosting. Hosting, then, is a two-way affair: the host must be accommodating to his guests, while the guests must give the hosts some kind of truthful information about what they're doing. In the absence of this equal exchange, neither host nor guests feels entirely comfortable.



Beorn confirms that Gandalf is telling the truth about the group's adventures in the Misty Mountains, and this confirms the importance of the host-guest exchange. Beorn becomes more trustworthy to the group—he's not leading the goblins to kill them—at the same instance that the group becomes more trustworthy to him.



Beorn proves himself to be a generous host after confirming that Gandalf is trustworthy. Again, truth is a kind of currency here, one that the group uses to "buy" important supplies from their host: weapons, food, advice, etc. It even seems as if Beorn—in the shape of a bear—is guarding them on their way.



*Bilbo feels a special connection to Gandalf; it's clear that he's closer to Gandalf, who wanted to wait and find Bilbo in the Misty Mountains, than he is to the dwarves, who wanted to move on without him. Gandalf's allusion to the Necromancer, who's never fully explained in *The Hobbit*, suggests what his "other business" might be—but even so, it seems as if Gandalf is deliberately abandoning the group at the time when they need him most.*



There's a noticeable contrast between the accommodating way Beorn treats Bilbo and the dwarves and the group's uneasy experiences in the forest. The forest, with its darkness and lurking giant insects, is like the opposite of a home.



Eventually, the group comes to a stream, and sees a boat on the opposite side. Remembering Beorn's advice, they don't swim in the stream, but throw a rope across to pull the boat over. Bilbo and the dwarves go across two or three at a time, with Bombur, the fattest, going last, despite his protestations. As they cross the river, they see an enchanted deer jump over the river. Though Thorin tells them to hold their fire, the dwarves waste all of their arrows trying to shoot the deer, making their bows useless. When it is Bombur's turn to cross, he falls in the water, and immediately falls asleep; the dwarves must now carry him. The group begins to hear mysterious laughter; it doesn't sound like it comes from goblins.

The dwarves send Bilbo to climb a tree in the hope that he'll be able to see the end of the forest. Bilbo climbs a tree, and at the top, he sees sunshine and beautiful butterflies, but no end to the trees. By the time he's climbed back down, he is tired and miserable at having to return to the forest; when he tells the dwarves what he saw, they're miserable, too.

Bombur wakes up, saying that he's been having lovely dreams of feasts and food. Thorin is irritated with this news, since the group's supplies have almost ran out. Bilbo and the dwarves see lights, and what appears to be the king of the woodland holding a grand feast. Thorin is reluctant to step off the path, but eventually he and the others wander toward the food. As soon as they arrive, it becomes completely dark, and Bilbo becomes separated from the rest of his group.

Bilbo falls asleep, and when he wakes up from dreams of food and home, he finds himself half-covered in spider thread—a giant spider has captured him and is about to poison him. Bilbo manages to free his sword and kill the spider. He names his sword **Sting**, and suddenly feels powerful and excited.

The enchanted hunt of deer is a familiar motif from early English and Celtic poetry, one with which Tolkien was extremely familiar from his academic studies. Here, the dwarves' failure to use their weaponry effectively signals that they're inadequately prepared for their quest, and that, for all his weaknesses, Bilbo might be a better adventurer than any of them. Where the dwarves rely on gut instinct and weaponry, Bilbo uses his ring, his trickery, and his words to survive on the open road.



There is something melancholy and deeply moving about the fact that the group is only a few feet away from sunshine and warmth—it's just that these things are high above them, not around them. This situation is a metaphor for the dwarves' larger situation: they know what their home is (the Lonely Mountain), but it is beyond their reach.



Bombur is almost a parody of Bilbo at his weakest—he dreams of food, he has to be carried, he contributes nothing to the group. This signals that Bilbo is no longer the "weak link" in the group; he's beginning to prove his worth and earn his fourteenth of the treasure. Even so, he's no more responsible than the dwarves when they run off the path.



Here, Bilbo participates in a crucial act of renaming. By giving a simple knife an impressive, evocative name, he makes himself more imposing and heroic—no common person could wield Sting. (It's interesting that this moment comes on the heels of Tolkien's descriptions of Orcrist and Glamdring, swords that do have an impressive history and legacy.) Language, then, is Bilbo's most important tool: when he uses words to make himself appear more impressive, his statement becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, and he does become more impressive. In naming his sword he gives it, and himself as its wielder, a legacy, and that legacy is connected to all other named swords.



Bilbo puts on his **ring** and follows the sounds of yelling, and, with a little luck, he comes to a web where a group of giant spiders is discussing the big group it has just captured. Bilbo recognizes the shapes of the dwarves, covered in thread. He finds a small stone and throws it at a spider, killing it. Confident that the spiders can't see him, he begins singing a song, mocking the remaining spiders and luring them away from their web. Bilbo doubles back and hastily uses his sword to cut the dwarves free. They are tired and sick from the spiders' poison, and Bombur is so exhausted that he falls out of the web. The spiders close in around Bombur, but Bilbo jumps down and kills half a dozen with his sword, while the dwarves use sticks and stones to help him scare away the rest.

Bilbo realizes that he'll have to explain his **ring** to the dwarves; he tells them that he can use it to disappear, and that they must run away from the spiders while he uses his ring and sword to fight them. For what seems a long time, Bilbo defends the dwarves, but eventually, the spiders give up and return to their lair.

The dwarves run away from the spiders, and eventually arrive at a place that they determine to be the home of the wood-elves, who are often hostile to visitors but are not evil like goblins. They are curious about Bilbo's story, and ask him many questions. It is at this time that they begin to take Bilbo more seriously, as Gandalf hinted would happen. Suddenly, the dwarves notice that Thorin is missing.

The narrator reveals what happened to Thorin: when the dwarves wandered off the path to find food, the wood-elves find and capture Thorin for supposedly attacking them at their feast. Thorin is taken before the king of the Wood-Elves; he tells him that he was traveling with his companions, but refuses to say what they were doing in the woods. The king accuses Thorin of lying, and, as a wood-elf, is hostile to dwarves in general, since the dwarves supposedly stole the elves' treasure long ago (the dwarves say exactly the same thing about the elves). The king sends Thorin to prison, where Thorin is given only bread and water, and wonders what became of his friends.

Bilbo continues to use words to fight his enemies—his song accomplishes its intended purpose, confusing and maddening the spiders. Bilbo, it's clear, has begun to enjoy his quest, and relish the battles with monsters instead of fearing them. It's clear how quickly Bilbo has grown into a good adventurer by the way he saves the lives of the thirteen dwarves—who have much more experience than he does with adventures, after all. Bilbo also gains a new skill—old-fashioned sword fighting.



Bilbo no longer hides his secrets from the dwarves, and perhaps this is because he's confident enough in his own abilities that he doesn't think he needs to hide them any longer.



Bilbo's reputation goes up enormously after he saves the dwarves' lives: they pester him with questions, much the way they've pestered Gandalf for information in the past. Yet the dwarves aren't exactly brilliant adventurers themselves—they lose Thorin without noticing.



Thorin's behavior before the king is perfectly indicative of his personal strengths and weaknesses. Thorin has enough loyalty in his quest to the Lonely Mountain that he doesn't reveal it to the king, and enough heroism to withstand any punishment. At the same time, he keeps his mouth shut when he could, presumably, apologize or be honest with the king and get a lighter sentence (or none at all). Yet Thorin wants his kingdom and all of its treasure for himself, and his refusal to divulge his goal is also a sign of his greed, and of his fear of the greed of others (which is itself a symptom of greed). At the same time, it is the long-standing conflict between dwarves and elves, not any individual conflict between Thorin and the Elvenking, that results in Thorin's imprisonment. Separated from his companions, Thorin begins to lose some of his hope.



CHAPTER 9: BARRELS OUT OF BOND

Bilbo and the dwarves wander through the woods, desperate for food. Just then a party of wood-elves emerges from behind the trees, and captures them all, except for Bilbo, who manages to put on his **ring** and then follow behind unnoticed as the elves march the dwarves into their city. The dwarves are presented to the Elvenking, who questions them and reprimands them for using his roads and attacking the spiders, thereby disturbing his people. The dwarves are angry with the Elvenking, and they're imprisoned in separate cells, unaware that Thorin is there as well.

Bilbo walks, invisible, through the elves' prison, not wanting to abandon the dwarves. He is cautious, for fear of the guards bumping into him. He wishes that he were back in his hobbit-hole, or that he could send a message to Gandalf, but eventually he realizes that he will have to save the dwarves himself.

After a week or two of searching, Bilbo finds Thorin in a special prison cell; Thorin has been so miserable that he was considering telling the elves about his quest for treasure. Bilbo tells Thorin that the other dwarves are there; and he tells the other dwarves that Thorin is nearby, too. Thorin's opinion of Bilbo grows quickly. Bilbo also discovers that there is a way out of the prison besides the front gates: there is a canal underneath the building that the elves use to transport barrels of wine.

One night, Bilbo overhears the elves talking about an upcoming great feast, full of wine and revelry. Bilbo seizes the opportunity, and when the guards are drinking upstairs, he steals the keys to the prison cells and frees every dwarf. He tells the dwarves to hurry and be silent as he loads them into barrels; normally the barrels transport wine down the river to trade with the men of Lake-town (which is also called Esgaroth). Now they will carry the dwarves to freedom. Bilbo lowers the barrels into the canal and they float down the river. Bilbo himself is forced to swim in the water, at least until he is able to swim to a barrel and use it as a raft.

The barrels run aground at a nearby town, where they're stored overnight. Bilbo swims ashore and uses his **ring** to steal some food and wine; the next day, the barrels are sent back along the river, and they float to Lake-town.

Once again, Bilbo demonstrates his value to the group, evading capture while his companions are marched off to imprisonment. It's important that Tolkien doesn't entirely take the dwarves' side in this passage: the Elvenking is right, after all, to be angry that the dwarves have disturbed the spiders, since he has a responsibility to keep his people safe. Bilbo and the dwarves are hardly perfect—they're not exactly good guests—and this is largely what makes them such interesting characters.



Bilbo demonstrates how much he has learned about taking care of himself—though he momentarily wishes he could rely on someone else for help, the direness of his situation encourages him to work alone to free his friends.



Thorin gains new respect for Bilbo, just as the other dwarves do. Indeed, Bilbo's intelligence and resourcefulness seem much more impressive than Thorin's integrity—he was considering giving up information about the treasure when Bilbo found him.



There is a childish quality to the dwarves' escape, since they make use of the elves' drunkenness—an unmistakably adult vice—when they escape. In this chapter, Bilbo has become responsible for the other members of his group, and the end is no exception—he's forced to swim alongside the barrels.



Tolkien doesn't give details about how Bilbo steals food that night—it's as if Bilbo has grown so competent as this kind of burglary that it's almost not worth mentioning.



CHAPTER 10: A WARM WELCOME

Bilbo, who has developed a cold in the water, floats along with the dwarves, still in their barrels. In the distance beyond Lake-town, he sees the Lonely Mountain, the mountain he and the dwarves have been trying to reach, and thinks that he isn't at all glad to see it. The narrator notes that Bilbo has found the only good path from Mirkwood to the dwarves' destination—the river—since the roads of Mirkwood have become too dangerous, or fallen into disrepair. Gandalf, having learned this information, makes haste to rejoin the dwarves, though Bilbo doesn't know this at the time.

The narrator notes that Lake-town is a town of men, which, like much of the area surrounding the Lonely Mountain, has fallen into disrepair following the arrival of Smaug. Though men in Lake-town are relatively far away from Smaug, and survive by trading with the elves along the river, they can still see the ruin Smaug caused—there are no trees or elaborate buildings. Some say that one day the dwarves will return to their home, and the men of Lake-town will return to and rebuild Dale, a large town that was prosperous when it traded with the dwarves and that Smaug later destroyed.

Long after the sun sets, Bilbo swims to the shore and lets the dwarves out of their barrels; they are extremely tired and hungry. Because he is so wet and exhausted, the narrator notes, it would be some time before Thorin was polite to Bilbo again; nevertheless, he thanks Bilbo for saving them from the elves. The group makes its way into Lake-town, and Thorin announces himself as the King Under the Mountain and demands to be taken to the Master of the town.

Men take the dwarves and Bilbo to see the Master of Lake-town, who is at a feast. He is astounded to hear that the King Under the Mountain has returned, and though there is an elf at the feast who says that Thorin and his comrades are escaped prisoners, the general excitement over Thorin's return is so great that the Master has no choice but to allow the group to remain free.

The narrator offers his own take on Bilbo's adventures, and explains that Bilbo was luckier than he could have imagined. This suggests that Bilbo's success as an adventurer—and, perhaps, all adventurers' success—isn't entirely up to them; there's an element of chance or fate at play. Gandalf will return to the dwarves to help them, but it's clear by now that Bilbo can often figure out how to get by without Gandalf.



Tolkien here portrays the importance of hope to the townspeople; they get through their difficult lives by thinking ahead to a brighter future. This reinforces the importance of music and poetry—the songs the dwarves sing at the beginning of The Hobbit, for instance, help to maintain this spirit of hope. The connection of the relative poverty of Lake-town to the disappearance of the dwarves from the Lonely Mountain again suggests the power when elves, men, and dwarves cooperate rather than fight, when they work together rather than split apart based on greed.



Thorin is a stubborn, occasionally ungrateful dwarf; this foreshadows the events of the final third of the book. Yet he's also a noble, impressive figure, who quickly switches from being cold and wet to commanding the respect of the entire town.



The Master is immediately shown to be a callous, greedy leader, who feasts even when his people are poor and hungry. Despite his greed, he's not a particularly powerful leader; he has to give in to the crowd because he isn't strong enough to disagree with them. This suggests that the Master stays in his position by manipulating popular opinion, rather ignoring it altogether. He comes to serve as a contract to other, more heroic characters.



For the next two weeks, Bilbo and the dwarves enjoy the town's hospitality, and regain their strength. After this time, Thorin announces to the Master that he is ready to go to the Mountain. The Master is surprised, because he had assumed that Thorin was a fraud and merely pretending to be the King Under the Mountain in order to get free food and lodgings. Nevertheless, the Master conceals his surprise and wishes Thorin good luck on his quest. He is happy to be rid of the dwarves, since they are expensive to take care of. Bilbo is the only one who's unhappy to be leaving the town.

The Master is such a fraud himself that he's amazed when his guest turns out to be sincere in his aims. Bilbo, despite the aptitude for adventure he's developed so far, isn't at all eager to go to the Lonely Mountain. This raises the question of what, exactly, Bilbo wants to get out of his quest. It may be that Bilbo wants a "healthy balance" of adventure and peace—too much of either one makes him anxious.



CHAPTER 11: ON THE DOORSTEP

Bilbo and the dwarves make use of the supplies and ponies the men of the town give them, and take two days to ride to Smaug's Desolation, the area around the Mountain that Smaug has claimed for himself. They are not cheery as they ride, since they know that they are nearing the end of their journey, and it might be an unpleasant end.

The climactic scenes of The Hobbit are about to begin, and everyone, including the dwarves, Bilbo, and Tolkien himself, knows it.



The group reaches the remains of Dale, which is in ruins. Thorin and Balin note sadly that the Dale was green and beautiful before Smaug destroyed it. Bilbo sees smoke rising from the Mountain, and assumes that Smaug must still be there. Balin says that he's probably right, but that Smaug could be gone for a time, with the underground halls still full of his smell.

Part of Smaug's danger to the dwarves is that he's unpredictable—surprisingly for such a large, visible animal. Thus, it's not even clear that he's really under the mountain.



The dwarves are afraid of what they'll encounter in the mountain, and have little spirit for their quest. Bilbo, surprisingly, is eager to use the map to find the secret passageway. However, after many days of looking, they do not succeed in finding it. Autumn is almost over, and winter is about to begin: at this point in the quest, the entire group, even Bilbo, begins to despair. Bilbo looks to the West and thinks fondly of his home. The dwarves suggest that he try to enter the Kingdom under the Mountain through the Main Gate; Bilbo turns down this suggestion immediately, since he'd likely to run into Smaug, and the dwarves reluctantly accept his decision.

Though Bilbo was initially reluctant to go to the mountain, the sight of the map—he's loved maps since long before he began the quest—reinvigorates his spirits. This, and the other conversations Bilbo has with the dwarves in this section, suggests that defeating Smaug is as much a practical problem as one of bravery—they have to figure out how to enter the mountain first.



Several days after they arrive at the Lonely Mountain, there is a new moon in the sky and the sun is setting. Bilbo sees a thrush knocking a snail against the rock, and this sight reminds him of the message Elrond read on the map: he realizes that he has found the secret entrance, and it is Durin's Day, the dwarf New Year. This means that the group can open the passageway. As the sun sets that evening, a single red ray of light shines on the side of the mountain; a rock falls, illuminating a keyhole, just as Elrond predicted. Quickly, Thorin produces his key, turns it in the keyhole, and opens a door into the side of the Lonely Mountain.

Bilbo continues to prove himself valuable to the quest, but his heroism here is based on traits not always connected to heroism (but which Tolkien seems to indicate should be). He is observant, and has a better memory than the other dwarves—he remembers that Elrond told them that on Durin's Day, the light of the sun would shine on the door to the secret passageway. The thrush proves a valuable ally to the dwarves, for reasons that Tolkien will make clear later on.



CHAPTER 12: INSIDE INFORMATION

Thorin announces that it is time for Bilbo to earn his pay by investigating the interior of the Mountain and acting as a burglar. Bilbo replies, impatiently, that he has already saved the dwarves twice, but that he'll go into the Mountain anyway, since he trusts his luck more than he used to at home. He asks for someone to accompany him into the Mountain; only Balin, who's fond of Bilbo, volunteers. The narrator notes that dwarves are tricky, and not always very honorable. These dwarves, the narrator continues, intend to keep their promise and pay Bilbo handsomely for his services, but at the same time, they're not necessarily willing risk their own lives to help him. Balin walks Bilbo into the Mountain, but eventually he hangs back and lets Bilbo proceed alone. Bilbo is afraid, but determined to go on—he has changed greatly since he left his home.

Bilbo climbs down into the mountain, where he notices a red light. As he gets closer to the source of the light, he realizes that he is looking at Smaug the dragon, lying on his treasure, asleep. The sight takes Bilbo's breath away—he has no words that can describe it. He takes a cup from the pile of treasure, proud of himself for his bravery, and runs back to the door, where he shows Balin and the other dwarves the cup. Everyone is elated with this find, until they hear a huge noise, the sound of Smaug's rage—the rage of a rich person who has just lost something he doesn't really need.

The dwarves are terrified to see Smaug emerge from the mountain, roaring with rage. The dwarves try to find shelter from Smaug; they are afraid to save Bofur and Bombur, who are stationed lower down on the mountain, in a more vulnerable position. Thorin insists that they rescue them by pulling them up with rope. Bilbo and the dwarves then run through the door into the mountain. They sleep there for the night, while Smaug searches the mountain for the thief who took his cup, and finds the ponies on which the dwarves rode. Though the ponies try to run away, Thorin despairs that they'll be killed.

Hidden just inside the mountain, the dwarves try to decide what to do. They have no way of killing Smaug, which was the flaw in their plan all along, and Bilbo points out that he can hardly be expected to steal the huge amount of treasure under the mountain piece by piece. Bilbo impatiently offers to go down to Smaug and see if he has any weaknesses. The dwarves accept his offer.

Bilbo is clearly enjoying himself when he notes how useful he's been to the dwarves so far: he's bragging. At the same time, the narrator paints a complicated portrait of dwarves. Some, such as Balin, are kind, and genuinely like Bilbo. Nevertheless, the dwarves as a group don't value Bilbo's life remotely as much as they value their gold and jewels. This foreshadows the conflicts of the final chapters of The Hobbit, and suggests that Bilbo, for all his flaws, is the real moral center of the book.



Smaug's evil is inseparable from his greed—he's dangerous because, much like the dwarves themselves (or Gollum with his ring), he loves his treasure to the point where he's unwilling to part with any of it. Tolkien lightens the mood here with an amusing comparison between Smaug and a grumpy old man, though that comparison also emphasizes that Smaug is the embodiment of a bad host: he shares nothing with anyone. It's also important that Bilbo can't describe Smaug's treasure—and nor can Tolkien. Language is a powerful tool, but it has its limits, and here it fails to account for the wonder of the dwarves' gold.



Thorin is hardly a perfect character, but he's fiercely loyal to his dwarves, who have followed him across the world in search of treasure. The fact that Smaug eats the dwarves' ponies makes him similar to the goblins, who did the same thing in the Misty Mountains. The good characters in The Hobbit are hugely different from each other, but the evil ones are largely the same: greedy, bloodthirsty, etc.



Bilbo's cleverness becomes increasingly important as it becomes clear that the dwarves aren't strong enough to kill the dragon. There's something cocky and arrogant about the way that Bilbo volunteers to talk to Smaug—he knows how valuable he is to the dwarves.



Bilbo again travels down to Smaug's lair, to which Smaug has returned. Smaug looks asleep to Bilbo, but Bilbo doesn't know about dragons' keen sense of smell. Smaug smells Bilbo, and opens his eye slightly—he has only been pretending to sleep. He addresses Bilbo as “thief,” and tells him to enter and take what he wants of the treasure, since there is plenty of it to spare. Bilbo is too clever to fall for this ploy, and puts on his **ring**, telling Smaug that he has only come to see if Smaug is as impressive as the tales say.

Smaug asks Bilbo for his name, and Bilbo replies that he is clue-finder, web-cutter, barrel-rider, and various other titles relating to his adventures. This, the narrator notes, is the proper way to talk to dragons, who can't resist riddles. Smaug, says he doesn't understand Bilbo but ate fourteen ponies that smelled of dwarf, and warns Bilbo not to associate with dwarves, since they'll surely kill him after Bilbo does their dirty work for them. He adds that Bilbo, who has probably been promised one-fourteenth of the treasure, won't receive any of it, since it's impossible for it to be transported back to his home. Bilbo, falling under the dragon's spell, is genuinely surprised to hear this, and wonders if the dwarves mean to cheat him. Nevertheless, he replies that he is confident in his friends, and turns the conversation to Smaug's armor.

Smaug, eager to show off his impregnability, rolls onto his side so that Bilbo can see his diamond armor. Bilbo notices, however, that there is a large hole in the waistcoat on Smaug's left breast. With this information, Bilbo runs away from Smaug, who in rage bellows fire after him. The dwarves treat Bilbo's burns, while Bilbo explains his conversation with Smaug. Bilbo, irritated with his wounds, throws a rock at a thrush, but Thorin tells him to stop, since thrushes are noble, talking birds who the dwarves have long used to communicate messages across great distances. Bilbo, meanwhile, regrets calling himself “barrel-rider,” since this will cause Smaug to think of Lake-town and to attack it. As the thrush listens, Bilbo tells the dwarves what Smaug said about being cheated out of his share; Thorin assures Bilbo that he was telling the truth, and tells him that he can choose his own fourteenth share.

Here, Bilbo's smallness and inconspicuousness—the qualities that made the dwarves initially doubt him—become assets, allowing him to enter Smaug's lair and talk to him. Smaug pretends to be a “good host” and offers Bilbo some of his gold, but Bilbo, who's dealt with plenty of bad hosts by this point, isn't fooled.



Bilbo's listing of his names is a glorious feat of language, proving how far he's come as a speaker and as a person. His experiences in the quest have become a part of his identity; he's not just a hobbit who happens to have ridden a barrel—he's a “barrel rider.” Yet these manipulations of language go both ways. Smaug uses words and cunning to manipulate Bilbo into doubting the dwarves' honesty—Bilbo will be unable to get these thoughts out of his head for some time. Smaug is not just greedy; he sows doubt among others and as a result makes them greedy, too. Nevertheless, Bilbo is loyal enough to his friends that he doesn't give in to his doubts, at least not right away.



Smaug's weakness is his vanity (which might be described as a kind of greed relating to one's own qualities)—if he hadn't given in to Bilbo's flattery, Bilbo would never have known that it was possible to kill him. Yet note, also, that it was Bilbo's own vanity that made him incautious with his self-naming as “barrel-rider” and put the people of Lake-town in danger. Bilbo shares Smaug's faults, just not to the same degree. When Thorin tells Bilbo not to hurt the thrush, he shows the alliance between dwarves and thrushes, and more generally, the importance of cooperating with nature. Smaug eats animals—in other words, attacks nature—and this is an essential part of how we know he's evil. Bilbo and the dwarves, on the other hand, cooperate with animals; ultimately, this becomes a key part of how they defeat the dragon.



The dwarves turn to talking about the treasures they will own once Smaug is defeated. The most important treasure that the dwarves mention is the Arkenstone, an incredibly beautiful gem that shines like the moon. The group then hears a roar in the middle of the night, and Bilbo urges Thorin to shut the door in the side of the mountain. Just as Thorin shuts the door, they hear a loud crash. Smaug had emerged quietly from his lair and attempted to attack them, and now has caused an avalanche, trapping them in the passageway. They listen through the door and hear Smaug fly to the river to attack the men of Lake-town, who, thanks to Bilbo's remarks about being a "barrel rider," Smaug thinks played some part in the theft of his cup.

The dwarves display their love for their treasure, a love that borders on greed, particularly in the case of the Arkenstone. Bilbo's remarks about being a "barrel-rider" do cause Smaug to attack the men. As Bilbo becomes more competent as an adventurer, his mistakes become proportionally greater, too. Heroism involves responsibility. Further, the fact that one's actions can affect others in unforeseen ways becomes a kind of moral underpinning for the rules behind being good hosts and good guests, toward cooperation and trust rather than greed – in essence, if one's own actions and successes impact and are supported by others, then one should be generous with those others as a way of acknowledging that interconnectedness.



CHAPTER 13: NOT AT HOME

The dwarves begin to despair, since they have no way out of the mountain. Strangely, Bilbo feels more hopeful than he had before—he urges the dwarves to follow him down the Smaug's lair. The group travels down through the mountain, cautious even though they think Smaug is outside.

Bilbo's hope is an important weapon in the group's conflict with Smaug. He first develops this sense of optimism when he's trapped under the Misty Mountains, and it serves him well when he's trapped under the Lonely Mountain.



Bilbo explores Smaug's pile of treasure, and urges Oin and Gloin to make fire; while they do so, he finds the Arkenstone, the gem Thorin had previously mentioned. Bilbo keeps the stone for himself, reasoning that Thorin told him he could keep any fourteenth share of the treasure he desired, though he still feels guilty about taking what is surely the most beautiful part of the treasure.

The fact that Bilbo takes the Arkenstone reveals several things. First, it shows that he's taken Smaug's words to heart, and is worried that he'll be unable to collect his fourteenth share of the treasure later. Second, it shows his nimbleness with words, since he's interpreting Thorin's promise that he can choose his fourteenth of the treasure given near the end of Chapter 12 to mean that he can take any part of the treasure he wants. Finally, it shows that even Bilbo isn't immune to the hypnotic effects of treasure. Overall, he seems uninterested in material wealth, but here, he changes his tune.



The dwarves are glad to see their treasure, and fill their pockets with whatever they can carry. Thorin wears regal armor and gives Bilbo a mail coat, which he accepts despite thinking that he must look ridiculous.

Bilbo rejects the pomp and pageantry of heroism—he's largely happy to be a humble hobbit, without any fancy armor.



Thorin guides Bilbo and the dwarves along the Running River, which leads from the inside of the Lonely Mountains to the Front Gate, overlooking the ruined town of Dale. Bilbo suggests that they move far away from the Gate, since Smaug will pass through it when he returns, and the dwarves move toward a look-out post in the mountain five hours away. Thorin insists that his hall under the mountain will be beautiful once it's been cleaned and restored to its former glory. The group wonders where Smaug could be.

Thorin's optimism in this scene indicates his greatest strengths and his greatest weaknesses. He's loyal to his inheritance—the treasure itself—and this makes him an effective leader, guiding his twelve followers across the world. At the same time, Thorin's overwhelming love for his home and his gold is a weakness, since it makes him selfish and uninterested in compromise of any kind – in these ways he actually resembles Gollum and Smaug.



CHAPTER 14: FIRE AND WATER

The dwarves are unaware, the narrator says, what happened to Smaug after he flew away from the mountain. The men in Esgaroth (i.e. Lake-town) see a light in the distance, which they think might be the dwarves returning to forging gold. But soon, they realize that Smaug is rapidly approaching their town. The Master tries to row away from the dragon in a boat, while the rest of the town blows warning trumpets and tries to defend itself. Smaug hopes that the townspeople will flee in boats, since it will be easy for him to trap them on the water and starve them out. He wreaks havoc on the town.

In the town lives a man named Bard. He is a descendant of Girion, who long ago was the Lord of Dale, before Smaug destroyed it. Bard commands a group of archers to shoot at Smaug. In the middle of Smaug's destruction, the same thrush that was listening to Bilbo when he told the dwarves about Smaug's weak point, flies to Esgaroth and tells Bard how to kill the dragon. Bard then takes his black arrow, which had been passed down to him from his father, and uses it to shoot Smaug in the weak point on his breast and kill him. Smaug dies, having already destroyed much of the city of Esgaroth.

The townspeople, including the Master, who has hastily rowed back to the town, praise Bard for his bravery, but think that he's died in the destruction. They say that they would have made him king had he survived. Bard appears suddenly, and the people chant that they want Bard for their king. The Master insists that Bard's ancestors were kings in Dale, not Esgaroth; when this doesn't work, he cleverly encourages the people to demand reparations from the dwarves for the damage Smaug has done to their home. This suggestion distracts the people from their proposal that Bard become king, and keeps the Master in power. Bard at first insists that it's foolish to be thinking of the dwarves, since surely Smaug has killed them too, but eventually he gives in to the Master, reasoning that the dwarves' treasure can be used to rebuild the city of Dale. He tells the Master that he'll obey him for the time being, but may break away to found his own community later on.

While Bard organizes the people of Esgaroth and marches them toward the Lonely Mountain, Beorn, the goblins, and the wood-elves also learn that Smaug has died. The Elvenking of Mirkwood marches to Esgaroth, where he offers aid to the sick and injured men in return for a reward of treasure later on. The Master hangs back, building a new town immediately north of Esgaroth with the resources the wood-elves lend the men, while the Elvenking and Bard then march their people further north to the dwarves' home under the mountain.

The Master reveals himself to be a coward, but the people of Esgaroth themselves are loyal enough to their own home that they stay and fight. Smaug meanwhile, reveals himself to be a sadistic villain, longing for the easy targets of boats in the water. It's possible that Tolkien's experiences as a soldier in World War I, the first war in which airplanes were used in large quantities, influenced his description of Smaug flying through the air, wreaking havoc on everything below him.



Bard's legitimacy as a warrior seems deeply rooted in his family—his ancestors were great lords. At the same time, his success in killing Smaug stems from the dwarves' cooperation with the thrushes—without this alliance, Bard would never have known where to shoot. Even the greatest and most impressive heroes in The Hobbit depend on other people and animals, and feel a deep sense of loyalty to others. (Bard, for instance, is fiercely loyal to his people.) Villains, on the other hand, are often portrayed as being on their own; Smaug is the perfect example.



The Master is a clever ruler (in the sense of keeping himself in power), even if he's a coward. In Machiavellian fashion, he turns the people against an external enemy, thereby distracting the attention from himself. Bard, in contrast, proves that he's an honest, sensible person when he says that the people shouldn't be thinking about the dwarves at all—but in the end, even he isn't immune to the force of the crowd. Though it is worth noting that the Master uses the idea of the treasure to keep himself in power, while Bard seeks to rebuild a city for the people of Esgaroth. Just as a good host trusts his guests, who in turn trust and respect him, a good ruler seeks to help his people who in turn grant him rule over them.



The stage is set for the final part of The Hobbit: Smaug is dead, but various other enemies, including goblins, remain alive. The book is becoming more obviously political—in large part, the conflicts in the next few chapters won't be physical, but verbal, hinging on complicated negotiations that involve various parties' sense, based on both legitimate right and greed, of what should be theirs.



CHAPTER 15: THE GATHERING STORM

Back on the Lonely Mountain, Bilbo and the dwarves are trying to determine where Smaug is. They notice the thrush that told Bard about Smaug's weak point. The dwarves complain however that they can't understand what the thrush is saying; as a result, the thrush flies away and brings back an old raven, Rac, who Bilbo and the dwarves can understand, since they have a historic friendship with the birds. Rac tells the group that Smaug is dead, having been shot by Bard, and they are overjoyed with this news. Rac adds that the men of the lake, along with the wood-elves, are marching to the Lonely Mountain seeking some of Thorin's treasure, and that Thorin should trust Bard, not the Master.

Thorin is furious to learn that others will try to take part of his treasure, and vows not to give away any of it. He tells Rac to fly to Dain, Thorin's cousin who lives in the Iron Hills, to summon him to come with an army, and orders his own group of dwarves to fortify the Lonely Mountain. Bilbo points out that they have only a little food, and thinks to himself that their adventure is over, and that he'd like to go home now.

Tolkien quickly gets the plot exposition out of the way—now, both sides (men and dwarves) know that Smaug is dead, and thus that the dwarves' treasure is up for grabs. Even though a conflict seems to be brewing between Thorin and Bard, it's worth noting that the thrush tells Thorin to trust Bard—but here Thorin refuses, marking a break from his cooperation with nature and the emergence of his greed above all. In many ways, Bard is like Thorin: they're both highly loyal to the people they lead. The difference is that Bard has already proven that he is willing to fight and negotiate on behalf of his people; it's not yet clear if Thorin is as devoted to his fellow dwarves, or if he's loyal, first and foremost, to his precious treasure.



Bilbo is no longer sure of his role, since the task he was hired for—burglary—he's already accomplished. Thus, he wants to return to his home as soon as possible. It's as if Bilbo alone is unaffected by the huge amounts of treasure around him (though, of course, it's worth remembering that Bilbo has already taken the Arkenstone for himself).



CHAPTER 16: A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

Now under siege from the men and elves, Thorin orders the dwarves to search for the Arkenstone, the most beautiful of the dwarves' jewels. Rac tells Thorin that Dain is only two days away and ready to fight, but adds that the ensuing battle will be long and bloody, and that Thorin's treasure may be the death of him. Thorin angrily refuses to listen to Rac.

Thorin refuses to listen to his people's historical allies, the birds. This suggests that Thorin is betraying his family's legacy with his selfish refusal to share his treasure—indeed, he's endangering the lives of his fellow dwarves by refusing to allow them to get food from outside their home. In some sense, Thorin's desire for his home and his treasure has made him forget, now that he has them, that a true home is founded on sharing it, on being a good host. Thorin's willingness to fight is here presented as un-heroic.



Bilbo offers to take Bombur's position as night watchman. While the other dwarves sleep, he puts on his armor and uses his **ring** to sneak out of the Lonely Mountain through the Gate. While he's crawling through a stream on the side of the mountain, he slips, and the elves notice him. He introduces himself as Bilbo Baggins, and asks to be taken to see Bard. The elves take him to Bard's tent, where he tells Bard that Thorin will gladly starve to death before he gives up his treasure, and that Dain is bringing an army to fight alongside Thorin. When Bard asks Bilbo whether he's threatening him or negotiating, Bilbo offers Bard the Arkenstone as a way of bargaining with Thorin and ending the siege. Bard is surprised at the sight of a hobbit wearing armor, but recognizes the Arkenstone is of enormous value, and accepts it from Bilbo, adding that Bilbo is more worthy of his armor than many others who have worn it.

Bilbo travels back to the Lonely Mountain, escorted up to the Gate by the elves. He returns to his watch and wakes Bombur up at midnight, pretending that he's been keeping watch the entire time. He falls asleep, and dreams of food.

Again, Bilbo is productive while the other characters sleep. Though it seemed (and may have been true) that he originally took the Arkenstone out of personal greed and mistrust of the dwarves, it becomes clear here that whatever greed he felt is outweighed by his desire for peace, and his desire to return to his home alive. Again, it's unclear how moral a decision this really is (in a way, it's a selfish decision, since Bilbo is valuing his own comfort above his friends' possessions), though it is an admirable triumph over his own personal greed. Bard and the elves show themselves to be reasonable, even likable people, because they respect Bilbo for his abilities as a burglar and a negotiator, and recognize his heroism.



Bilbo does not give away the Arkenstone and then leave. He returns to the dwarves, revealing that he both feels a connection to them and that it was this connection that drove him to give up the Arkenstone: he sees his actions as something that could save the dwarves from greedily marching to their own destruction. The fact that Bilbo dreams of food harkens back to his love of domesticity, but also connects that domesticity to his heroism here: he wants to be able to return to that domesticity after his adventure, and he wants the dwarves to be able to do the same.



CHAPTER 17: THE CLOUDS BURST

The day after Bilbo gives him the Arkenstone, Bard, the elves, and an old, cloaked man march to the Gate of the Lonely Mountain to greet Thorin. They ask him if he will bargain with them for some of the treasure. When Thorin refuses, Bard produces the Arkenstone, and insists that while he is not a thief, he'll trade it back to the dwarves in return for what his people rightfully deserve: food and shelter. Thorin is furious, and demands to know how Bard got the Arkenstone – Bilbo timidly admits that he was the one who gave it away. Thorin seizes Bilbo, insults him, and wishes aloud that Gandalf were with him; at this moment, Gandalf reveals himself to be the old, cloaked man, and demands that Thorin release Bilbo.

Bilbo, in admitting that he was the one who gave up the Arkenstone, faces the consequences of his actions rather than simply trying to manipulate events. Put another way, Bilbo (with some nervousness) trusts that the good intentions of his actions will be understood. Gandalf's sudden appearance—perfectly timed for the moment when Bilbo needs him most—suggests that he's more involved in the dwarves' quest than he seems, and in fact, might have been secretly watching them all along.



Bilbo tries to justify himself to Thorin. He explains that Thorin told him he could choose any part of the treasure for himself as his share, and so he chose the Arkenstone. Thorin doesn't disagree with Bilbo, but he calls Bilbo a traitor and dismisses him from the Lonely Mountain, saying that he hopes he'll never see Bilbo again. Bilbo departs from the mountain and joins Gandalf, the men, and the elves. While Bilbo is saying goodbye to the other dwarves, Thorin threatens to shoot him.

Thorin tells Bard that in exchange for the Arkenstone he will trade him one-fourteenth of the treasure, which he will take from Bilbo's share. Meanwhile, Thorin thinks to himself that he might be able to regain the Arkenstone with Dain's help, and thus avoid having to surrender any of the treasure to Bard. Bard tells Thorin that he has until noon of the next day to deliver him the treasure.

Shortly after Thorin agrees to surrender some of his treasure, Dain arrives, leading an army of strong, tough dwarves carrying many supplies. Bard refuses to let him through to the Lonely Mountain and give supplies to the other dwarves. Dain plans to wait out Bard, while in the meantime many other dwarves related to Thorin arrive from around Middle-Earth, having been alerted by ravens and thrushes that they are needed. Bard sends messengers to the Gates in the hope of negotiating, but the dwarves shoot arrows at these messengers instead of giving up their treasure. Dain and his army advance toward the men, and Bard is ready to open fire on them, starting a huge battle. The Elvenking urges Bard to wait a little longer, in the event that a last-minute event might prevent war.

Just as a battle is about to break out between the elves and men and the dwarves, the skies darken, and Gandalf comes, bringing news that a new goblin leader, Bolg, and his army of goblins and wargs is about to arrive – the skies are black because an army of bats accompanies the goblins. The narrator explains that the goblins, incensed by the death of the Great Goblin, have been pursuing the dwarves in search of revenge. With Gandalf's encouragement, the men and elves ally with the dwarves and fight against the goblins and wargs: this is eventually called The Battle of the Five Armies. In order to defeat the goblins, the elves, men, and dwarves lure them into the wide valley between two arms of the Lonely Mountain, and then surround them. In this manner, a long, bloody battle begins.

While Thorin recognizes that Bilbo's interpretation of Thorin's words is accurate, Thorin nonetheless refuses to accept the spirit behind Bilbo's actions: to try to avoid a war fueled by greed. Rather than see Bilbo as trying to save the dwarves from themselves, Thorin's greed for his treasure is such that he can only see giving it away as treachery and as a basis to sever his friendship with Bilbo. Note that Thorin and the dwarves, now, are isolated and alone in the same way that evil characters like Smaug and Gollum were portrayed as being.



Despite Thorin's loyalty to his word, he's so greedy that he always thinks about ways to keep his wealth, even if it involves war. This is ultimately what distinguishes him from Bard: although both leaders regard treasure as extremely important, Bard does so because he sees it as a way to promote peace and happiness in his people, whereas Thorin sees treasure as an end in itself.



War seems inevitable: the dwarves' armies are ready to fight, and Bard's last-minute efforts for a compromise are met with arrows. Yet the Elvenking remains hopeful, telling his soldiers, and the men, to wait, in the event that peace could be reached. This moment partially justifies Bilbo's feeling that the elves are the best of the three peoples at the mountain—they seem the least willing to resort to violence, the most wise and patient. Here the Elvenking's words pause the march to war, at least for a while.



Gandalf is a powerful warrior, but he's an equally brilliant organizer and negotiator. Here, he organizes three opposing forces, men, dwarves, and elves, together in the interest of peace. This loose confederacy, united against a common enemy but still somewhat at odds with itself, might reflect Tolkien's experiences during World War I, when the "Triple Entente" of France, England, and Russia, three historical enemies, allied together to defeat Germany.



Bilbo is unimportant during the Battle of the Five Armies; he wears his invisibility **ring** the whole time. Nevertheless, for a long time afterwards, it is this portion of his journey that he's most fond of relating to others. Bilbo, standing close to Gandalf, sees the men, dwarves, and elves fight together to defeat the goblins. The elves are the first to attack the goblins, and at first, it seems as if the goblins will be defeated. Then, the men, dwarves, and elves realize that they have only defeated the first wave of enemies—many more goblins are coming.

Here, at the climax of The Hobbit, Bilbo doesn't play a crucial role at all—on the contrary, he hides away. It's as if Tolkien has been preparing Bilbo for the role of a hero throughout the story, and then doesn't fulfill. But Bilbo's distaste for fighting isn't purely cowardly—he has legitimate moral reasons for hesitating to fight. He doesn't value treasure, as the peoples around him do, and indeed, his role in the quest has been over for some time. Further, the novel has emphasized different types of heroism, and Bilbo's heroism is not the sort to turn the tide of a pitched battle.



Goblins quickly overwhelm the mountain. But just as they begin to climb the walls of the Main Gate, Thorin and the other twelve dwarves burst out and bravely fight back. Many die throughout the battle; the elves, in particular, suffer great losses, since they didn't bring enough troops to begin with. Bilbo stands with the elves, since he would prefer to ally with them. He thinks that battle is a dirty business, and that all the stories that say that battle is glorious are lies. The battle goes on for many hours, without a clear victor. The goblins seem like they are about to take the Gate when Bilbo sees the Eagles arriving from the skies, but a stone hits him in the head, and he loses consciousness.

There's nothing glorious about the Battle of the Five Armies—Tolkien doesn't throw in any jokes or funny asides, as he did in early scenes that involved violence. With the exception of leaders like Bard, who seem genuinely committed to helping others, most of the different peoples participating in battle are greedy, short-sighted, and selfish (not unlike the Western countries who fought in World War I)—by this logic, battle is a dirty business indeed, and Bilbo isn't wrong to avoid it. Tolkien might be remembering his own experiences in the trenches during the Battle of the Somme, when he was almost killed.



CHAPTER 18: THE RETURN JOURNEY

When Bilbo regains consciousness, he is alone. He stumbles around, and sees that the goblins have been defeated. He thinks that if this is victory, it's very disappointing. He meets a man who takes him to the Dale, where Gandalf, his arm in a sling, is standing beside Thorin, who has been fatally wounded.

Bilbo not only avoids the battle, he's actually unconscious for most of it. Yet even waking he continues to express his doubts with battle, and with the supposed heroism of fighting. The fact that even Gandalf, the most powerful and seemingly immortal person in The Hobbit, is wounded suggests the brutality of the Battle of the Five Armies. Thorin's fatal wounds suggest that he has been punished for his greed, yet the fact that he is next to Gandalf indicates that somehow he has found some kind of redemption: he did ultimately give up the security of the Lonely Mountain to join with the elves and men in their battle against the goblins.



On his deathbed, Thorin tells Bilbo that he regrets calling him a traitor and expelling him. He promises Bilbo his one-fourteenth of the treasure, noting that he is now traveling to the land where gold and silver can't be carried. Bilbo, greatly moved, bids farewell to Thorin, and tells him that he feels lucky to have quested alongside him. Bilbo feels personally responsible for the battle, since it was he who stole the Arkenstone, but at the same time reasons that he can't be blamed, since he stole the stone to bring about peace.

Bilbo learns what happened at the end of the Battle of the Five Armies. The Eagles had noticed the goblins marching toward the Lonely Mountain, so they flew to intervene, arriving at the last minute. Even with the eagles, the men, dwarves, and elves were outnumbered – only with the arrival of Beorn, taking the shape of a giant bear, were the goblins defeated. Upon seeing that Thorin was wounded, Beorn became so angry that he destroyed a huge chunk of the goblin army – so many of them that for years afterward the area around the **Misty Mountains** was safe and secure.

The Eagles depart after intervening in battle, and Dain replaces Thorin as King Under the Mountain. All of Thorin's original dwarves except for Fili and Kili survive. Dain is more generous with his birthright than Thorin was; he sends Bard one-fourteenth of the treasure, which Bard uses to help his people rebuild. Bard tells Bilbo that he would have given him a huge amount of gold, except that Bilbo's share of the treasure, it had already been agreed, was to be given to the men. Bilbo says that he is relieved that he doesn't have much treasure to take back with him, since it's difficult to carry. He departs for his home, accompanied by Gandalf and carrying two chests of treasure with him. Before he leaves, he says goodbye to the dwarves, reminding them that they're always welcome in his home. He also gives the Elvenking a necklace. When the Elvenking is confused, Bilbo explains that the necklace is a gift in return for his hospitality.

Tolkien, who was raised a Christian, alludes through Thorin's words to an afterlife that the characters of The Hobbit can all access. This helps us understand why Thorin's obsession with treasure is so small-minded: he can't take it with him when he dies. It is a measure of Thorin's ultimate goodness that he recognizes his own former greed and small-mindedness. In the midst of this Christian-influenced morality, Bilbo makes an unusual moral judgment of his own. He knows that he was responsible for the battle, insofar as he stole the Arkenstone, but he doesn't feel that he's done anything wrong, since his intentions were good. And, in fact, in a novel that regularly makes clear that both good and bad characters share traits like greed, one can argue that in fact the goodness or badness of character's intentions are what separate the good from bad characters.



Beorn and the Eagles prove themselves to be invaluable, winning the battle for the men, dwarves, and elves. In this way, Gandalf proves himself to be the most important person in the Battle of the Five Armies—without his influence, his friends Beorn and the Lord of the Eagles would never have traveled to provide help.



The Battle of the Five Armies results in peace and new trust between the dwarves, men, and elves, where before there had been huge tension. It's as if the death and violence on the battlefield reminded everyone that there are more important things in life than wealth. Thus, Dain generously gives the people of Lake-town money to help them rebuild their town, and Bilbo gives the Elvenking a necklace—he even expresses his gladness that he doesn't have much treasure to carry, where before he had worried that he would be given less than he deserved. In spite of Bilbo's arguments and quarrels with the dwarves, he parts ways with them on excellent terms.



Over the course of the next year, Gandalf and Bilbo travel back to hobbit-town. While they have many adventures on the way back, the way is far easier than it was when traveling toward the Lonely Mountain, since most of the goblins are dead, having been killed at the Battle of the Five Armies. Beorn, who has become an important chief, is also responsible for protecting them during their travels home. As Bilbo and Gandalf climb the **Misty Mountains**, Bilbo looks behind him, and sees snow on the Lonely Mountain. Amused that where once there was fire there is now only snow, he thinks to himself that even dragons meet their end. He is feeling tired, and is eager to return to his home and armchair.

At the beginning of The Hobbit, Bilbo felt a vague, even subconscious desire to leave his home and travel elsewhere. Now, he is eager to return, and we sense that he's quenched his desire for adventure, at least for some time. Bilbo's quest forced him to grow, to discover things about himself he never knew, and at the same time to make him value what he had before: his home. Bilbo also shows signs of maturity when he muses on the sudden changes that the Lonely Mountain has undergone recently. The philosophical observations about the inevitability of change and death would be inconceivable coming from Bilbo at the beginning of the novel—his experiences with death and sudden change have clearly affected the way he thinks.



CHAPTER 19: THE LAST STAGE

On May 1st, Bilbo and Gandalf pass through Rivendell, where the elves sing songs of Smaug's defeat and the dwarves' victory. Gandalf tells Elrond of the group's adventures – Bilbo is largely too tired to explain. Bilbo learns that while Gandalf was away from his quest with the dwarves, the wizard was driving the mysterious Necromancer from his home near Mirkwood; thus, the forest and much of the surrounding area will be safer in the future.

At every stage of The Hobbit, song and poetry marks the major events of the dwarves' quest. Bilbo has participated in an important adventure, and this means that he will be remembered long after his death, in the songs of the dwarves and the elves—he too has been written into history. Another mark of the importance of the group's quest is that the journey home is relatively safe and easy—many evil foes have been defeated. It's a mark of Tolkien's imagination that he doesn't fully—or even partially—explain who the Necromancer is: Middle Earth is a vast world, only a fraction of which is explained in The Hobbit (this world, including the Necromancer, is much further developed in Tolkien's subsequent Lord of the Rings trilogy).



As Gandalf and Bilbo get closer to hobbit-town, Bilbo remembers his adventures, which seem to have occurred a decade ago, though it's been only a year since he left his home. He and Gandalf come upon the treasure that belonged to the three trolls. Though at first he offers the treasure to Gandalf, he eventually takes some of it for himself when Gandalf reminds him that he may need it someday.

Bilbo remembers his adventures having begun long ago because he has changed enormously in the last year—he's become more resourceful, braver, etc. At the same time, Bilbo doesn't seem much more interested in treasure or gold than he was at the beginning of the book. This suggests that the real value of his quest wasn't in the treasure chests he brought back with him, but rather in the personal change he experienced as a result of participating in it.



When Bilbo arrives in hobbit-town, he is surprised to learn that he has been presumed dead, and the other hobbits have been raiding his house and taking his possessions. Even after Bilbo returns, some of his possessions remain missing, and some people, such as his relatives, the Sackville-Bagginses, say that he is an imposter. Among the hobbits, Bilbo has gained a damaging reputation for being adventurous and a friend to the elves, but he does not mind. He enjoys his life in his hobbit-hole even more than he did before he met Gandalf. He rarely uses his sword or **ring**, and donates his mail coat to a museum.

Years later, Bilbo is working on a memoir about his journey to the Lonely Mountain, called “There and Back Again, a Hobbit’s Holiday,” when he hears a **ring** and finds that Balin and Gandalf are visiting. Bilbo learns that Bard has rebuilt the town of Dale, now a thriving city. Lake-town is also prosperous once again, due to the friendly relationships between men, elves, and dwarves, which lead to trade and travel. The old Master has died, having succumbed to “dragon-sickness” and been abandoned by his friends. The new Master, Bard, is wiser and more honest, and is loyal to his people’s interests.

Bilbo says that the prophecies that the rivers would one day run with gold have come true, and Gandalf replies that they have. He adds that Bilbo didn’t succeed in his quest by himself, since he’s only a little fellow. Bilbo responds that he’s glad he’s only a little fellow.

With Bilbo’s return to hobbit-town, he “rises from the dead,” since his neighbors had thought he was deceased. This is strangely appropriate, since Bilbo has indeed been “reborn” in the last year—his personality and character has changed. The greed of Bilbo’s neighbors shows that greed is prevalent even in the “safety” of domestic life, and that Bilbo truly is a rare breed—a brave, daring adventurer who, unlike almost everyone around him, has no real interest in material possessions. Similarly, Bilbo recognizes that neither his adventures nor the things he got from it are to be hoarded: he gives up the implements of his heroism, such as his sword, with little fanfare.



In the same way that Bilbo reinvented himself by renaming his sword Sting, Bilbo takes control over his own life, literally “writing his own story.” Meanwhile, the information that Bard has brought peace and prosperity to his people ends The Hobbit on an optimistic note. The dwarves may have sought their treasure for selfish reasons, but ultimately, their quest resulted in greater happiness for everyone as the cooperation inspired by the Battle of the Five Armies has held. The Master, like all the bad characters of the novel, ends up alone. It’s not clear if Bilbo’s memoir is supposed to be the book The Hobbit (half of the title is the same), but if this is the case, it shows a new stage in Bilbo’s maturity: his writing is no clumsy diary, but a sophisticated, well-written adventure story.



Bilbo brings the book “full circle,” noting that the prophecy mentioned in the first chapter has come true. At the same time, Tolkien closes The Hobbit by questioning how much of a hero Bilbo really is. He’s accomplished a great deal, to be sure, but as Gandalf points out, he hasn’t done it by himself. Bilbo, for his part, seems glad to be only a minor player in the world—he’s found happiness in being a humble man of simple tastes—a position that, having adventured, he has now earned and chosen as the right one for him—and this is the model of happiness with which the book ends.





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