



THE HOBBIT

REFERENCE GUIDE


ABOUT THE BOOK AND THE AUTHOR

J.R.R. TOLKIEN — John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (January 3, 1892 – September 2, 1973) was an English writer, professor, poet, and philologist (an expert in the history of languages). He taught at Oxford University, where he was a close friend of C. S. Lewis (author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*). His writings were influenced by Germanic, Old English, and Norse mythology and sagas. Tolkien is best known for writing *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*, and for creating the imaginary setting for these works, Middle-earth.

THE HOBBIT — Also titled *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*. A classic fantasy novel for children, published in 1937, this book was Tolkien's first work describing events in his imaginary world of Middle-earth. The tone of *The Hobbit* is largely light and targeted towards children, and introduces hobbits, dwarves, and Gandalf, and the Ring that later figures strongly in the plot of *The Lord of the Rings*.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS — Published in 1954–55 as a sequel to *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* is a darker, more serious work of high fantasy that tells a wider, more far-reaching, and more dire tale of events that threaten the fate of Middle-earth.

MIDDLE-EARTH — The fictional and imaginary setting for many of Tolkien's works including *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and much of *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales*. Tolkien's richly imagined world includes maps, genealogies, legends, and geographies, and is populated by races of elves, dwarves, humans, orcs, wizards, and more.



PLACES IN *THE HOBBIT*

THE SHIRE — A region of Middle-earth that is the homeland of the hobbits. An idyllic, agrarian place largely removed from the politics and events of the rest of Tolkien's world.

HOBBITON — A village in the Shire that's home to Bilbo Baggins (and later, as we see in *The Lord of the Rings*, Bilbo's nephew Frodo Baggins, Samwise Gamgee, and others). This is the beginning and endpoint of Bilbo's adventure with the dwarves and Gandalf.

RIVENDELL — Home of the group of elves ruled by the elven leader Elrond. This place serves as a safe haven for the adventuring party.

MISTY MOUNTAINS — The mountain range that the adventuring party must cross on their way from Rivendell to Mirkwood and the Lonely Mountain. In these mountains they encounter goblins, and Bilbo encounters Gollum.

MIRKWOOD — The dangerous, enchanted forest that Bilbo and the Dwarves (without Gandalf) must cross on their way to Lonely Mountain. The party encounters giant spiders and the wood-elves, who imprison the dwarves.

LAKE-TOWN (OR ESGAROTH) — A town populated by humans on Long Lake near the Lonely Mountain, where the dragon Smaug lives.

DALE — A ruined city on the River Running, between the Lonely Mountain and the Long Lake, destroyed some years ago by Smaug the dragon.

THE LONELY MOUNTAIN — The mountain east of Mirkwood, formerly home to dwarves, and later inhabited by the Smaug, the dragon who killed all the dwarves, destroyed the town of Dale, and made his lair on the dwarven treasure hoard.

OBJECTS

THE RING — The magic ring that Bilbo finds in Gollum's cave in the Misty Mountains. Makes the wearer invisible. Later revealed in *The Lord of the Rings* to be the "one ring" which is central to the fate of Middle-earth.

THE ARKENSTONE — A massive, white gemstone that is a dwarven heirloom and sought by Thorin Oakenshield. Thorin's ancestor, Thráin the Old, originally found it. Bilbo steals it from Smaug's treasure pile and uses it as a bargaining chip to avert the dispute among the dwarves, men and elves.

STING — The magical sword that Bilbo finds in the trolls' treasure hoard after the trolls are defeated. Bilbo names it "Sting" after fighting the giant spiders of Mirkwood. The blade glows blue when orcs or goblins are present.

RACES

HOBBITS — A hairy-footed race of diminutive peoples in J.R.R. Tolkien's imaginary world of Middle-earth, approximately three and a half feet tall. Shy and fond of ale, gardening, and the quiet agrarian life, they are also capable of amazing feats of stealth and courage.

ELVES — Not tiny elves of most fairy tales, Tolkien's elves are human-sized, but more regal and wise (and aloof), more beautiful than humans, with magical abilities and skills in art and song. They are also great lovers of nature.

DWARVES — Tolkien's dwarves are not cute garden gnomes, but great and powerful warriors, crafters and miners. Honorable and proud, they are also portrayed as being greedy for treasure, quick to anger and apt to withdraw from the world into their mines. They are taller than hobbits but shorter than humans and elves.

WIZARDS — Gandalf is a wizard, taking the form of an old man but in fact possessing great physical, mental and magical powers. Wizards are sent to assist the peoples of Middle-earth to contest Sauron (although this is not revealed in *The Hobbit*.)

HUMANS — Perhaps the least remarkable of all of Tolkien's races, with no special powers or magical abilities. In *The Hobbit*, few humans play a key role in the plot, aside from the ones encountered in Lake-town, notable Bard the Bowman.

KEY CHARACTERS

BILBO BAGGINS — A hobbit and a burglar. Or, in Gandalf’s word, “If I say he is a Burglar, a Burglar he is, or will be when the time comes. There is a lot more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself” (p. 23). The fourteenth member of Thorin’s company, which was made to return to the Lonely Mountain and reclaim the dwarves’ treasure. Over the course of *The Hobbit*, he find his courage, bravery and fighting skill.

GANDALF — The powerful wizard, in the guise of a man, who appears on Bilbo’s doorstep. In *The Hobbit*, he is described as “an old man with a staff. He had a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, a silver scarf over which his long white beard hung down below his waist, and immense black boots” (p. 5). Somewhat irascible, and apt to speak in riddles.

ELROND — Chief of the elves and Lord of Rivendell. Elrond gives shelter to Bilbo Baggins and the dwarves. Elrond and Bilbo later become friends.

THRANDUIL (OR KING THRANDUIL) — The Elvenking who rules the northern part of Mirkwood. His guards capture the dwarves and lock them in his dungeons.

THORIN OAKENSHIELD — He is the leader of the 13 dwarves, and driving force behind the quest to retake the Lonely Mountain from Smaug the dragon and reclaim his people’s lost treasure. The son of Thráin II and the grandson of King Thrór, he’s known to be arrogant, stubborn and proper, but also a fierce warrior.

OTHER DWARVES: Tolkien does easily distinguish each of the other dwarves in the adventuring party. **DWALIN** is the second-eldest dwarf (after Thorin) and had travelled to the Lonely Mountain prior to Smaug’s arrival. **BALIN** is a brother of Dwalin. **KILI** and **FILI** are the two youngest dwarves, and with the sharpest eyes, they are often used as scouts for the party. The other dwarves include: **DORI**, the brother of **NORI** and **ORI** (it is Dori who carries Bilbo in the tunnels of the Misty Mountains, and when escaping from the wargs with the eagles, saves Bilbo); **OIN** and **GLOIN**, also brothers; **BIFUR** and **BOFUR**, cousins; and “poor, fat” **BOMBUR**, Bofur’s brother and Bifur’s cousin, who makes foolish mistakes and often impedes the progress of the party.

BARD — Human archer from Lake-town who kills Smaug with a single arrow, aka the “Black Arrow.” He’s also an heir to Girion, the last king of old Dale. Also called “Bard the Bowman.”

CREATURE CHARACTERS

TROLLS — Three comic, cockney-speaking, bickering, and dimwitted trolls named Bill, Bert and William capture Bilbo and the dwarves. They are later tricked by Gandalf when the sunlight turns them to stone.

BEORN — A friend of Gandalf's who lives near Mirkwood. He's a shape-shifter — a man who can become a black bear — and lives in a home with a company of animal companions. Later, in the Battle of Five Armies, he slays the Goblin leader, Bolg.

GOLLUM — The mysterious, tortured humanoid Bilbo finds living on an island amid a cavern lake deep in the tunnels of the Misty Mountains. Bilbo finds Gollum's magic ring. We later learn the significance of the ring, and Gollum, in *The Lord of the Rings*.

GOBLINS — Tolkien alternately calls these evil, humanoid, subterranean-dwelling creatures “goblins,” “hobgoblins,” and “orcs.” Lead by their Great Goblin, whom Gandalf slays.

EAGLES — Giant eagles who come to the aid of Bilbo, Gandalf, and the dwarves, carrying them away from danger. In Tolkien's world, they are wise and can speak.

GIANT SPIDERS — Another of Tolkien's clever creations. A colony of these intelligent, huge spiders lives in Mirkwood and entraps the dwarves in their webs. Bilbo fights the spiders and rescues them.

WARGS — A race of giant and nasty wolf-like creatures. They are allied with the goblins, and let the goblins ride them into battle.

SMAUG — A most especially greedy, strong, and wicked dragon. Smaug stole the treasure of King Thrór, Thorin's grandfather, and the dwarves of The Lonely Mountain.

THE NECROMANCER — An evil sorcerer, he does not explicitly appear in *The Hobbit*, but he is referred to in passing. It is later revealed that the Necromancer is a previous manifestation of Sauron, the Dark Lord featured in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Written by journalist and critic Ethan Gilsdorf, author of *Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks: An Epic Quest for Reality Among Role Players, Online Gamers, and Other Dwellers of Imaginary Realms*.

© 2012 Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

