



The Hobbit or There and Back Again

J.R.R. Tolkien

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In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.

Written for J.R.R. Tolkien's own children, *The Hobbit* met with instant critical acclaim when it was first published in 1937. Now recognized as a timeless classic, this introduction to the hobbit Bilbo Baggins, the wizard Gandalf, Gollum, and the spectacular world of Middle-earth recounts of the adventures of a reluctant hero, a powerful and dangerous ring, and the cruel dragon Smaug the Magnificent. The text in this 372-page paperback edition is based on that first published in Great Britain by Collins Modern Classics (1998), and includes a note on the text by Douglas A. Anderson (2001). Unforgettable!

The Hobbit or There and Back Again Details

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Author : J.R.R. Tolkien

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From Reader Review The Hobbit or There and Back Again for online ebook

Chelsea Humphrey says

I probably won't write a full review here, as this is just a reread for me, but I found this just as enchanting as the first time I read it. While I still like this one only SLIGHTLY less than The Lord of the Rings, I'm glad I took the opportunity to read this first before diving into a reread of LOTR this year. When I first read Tolkien's books about 15 years ago I didn't experience The Hobbit until I finished LOTR, so it gave me the feeling of being able to read this one as an introduction to the latter book. Highly recommended to anyone who may not have read this yet; Tolkien's world building and storytelling skills are rarely matched and aimed for all ages.

Jason Koivu says

From a hole in the ground came one of my favorite characters of all time, the very reluctant and unassuming hero, Bilbo Baggins.

As a child, *The Hobbit* sparked my young imagination, causing wonderful daydreams and horrible nightmares. As a teen, the book made me want to become a writer of fantastical tales...or go shoeless, live in a hole and smoke a pipe. As an adult, Tolkien's novel maintains within me a link to my childhood, safekeeping cherished memories and evoking everlasting emotions.

The troubles with trolls, those slinking spiders, the finding of treasure, cave exploration, riddles in the dark...it all added up in me a love for adventure. I would make many an ornate wooden sword in my father's basement workshop, because of Sting. Funny I didn't take to wearing rings though...

Being pint-sized, Mr. Baggins makes the perfect magnetic character for a young person. He is about a child's size, yet he is mature. Similar, yet something to aspire to. His diminutive stature made his implausible escapes and victories that much more satisfying. Nothing bores me more than muscle-bound killing machines wielding swords the size of windmill blades.

I have read this fantastic tale a number of times, watched the 70s cartoon movie version countless times and was counting down the days with unabashed eagerness until Peter Jackson's new live action film came out. I will continue to read *The Hobbit* again and again, for the road goes ever, ever on...

Appendix-ish type reviews

The Hobbit, the 1977 animated film version by Rankin & Bass

This may be the movie I've watched the most in my life. This is the one I can quote from start to finish and annoy the fuck out of my friends. I try to refrain, but when John Huston bellows out, "I am Gandalf and Gandalf means ME!!!"...well, I just can't help myself. Crazy-off-his-rocker Brother Theodore as Gollum still astounds me with the sheer depth of his guttural growl. Sorry voice-straining Serkis, but this is the real Gollum, the creepy muthah that kept me up nights. Though Rankin & Bass's version skips over the whole Beorn scene entirely, coming in at 90 minutes, they actually managed to pack in quite a bit of story.

Certainly it is truncated (to absurdity during The Battle of Five Armies), but at least it's not overblown, as appears to be happening with Peter Jackson's unnecessarily long trilogy of this single book.

The Hobbit, or There And Back Again (An illustrated book by Rankin & Bass)

Though it's a few pages shorter than the regular paperback version, this marvelous part-text, part-illustrated version seems to be unabridged. It includes screenshots taken directly from the 70s cartoon, plus where the movie skipped over parts of the book they've included extra illustrations, admittedly of mixed quality. It's a little strange to see the same characters rendered differently sitting side by side...

...but nonetheless, it's always fun to see how artists interpret the work, especially when it's a work dear to your heart.

The Hobbit, a film version by Peter Jackson

It's never fun to see an artist tear the heart out of a work. Peter Jackson was given too long a leash when New Line stretched this one book out to three separate movies. Instead of one movie packed with awesome, we get three that, so far (I've yet to see the third and I'm not eager to), have been watered down and dragged out. Extra scenes are added and add nothing: Really, a sleigh ride chase scene with an incredibly minor character? And honestly, can Richard Armitage (as Thorin Oakenshield) act with any other part of his body besides his eyebrows?

Darth J says

Michael Finocchiaro says

What makes The Hobbit such a seminal work in the fantasy genre? Is it the nine hours of over-budget, sensorially explosive movies by Peter Jackson? Nope. Is it a complex tale of multiple human kingdoms slaughtering each other for an Iron Throne with buckets of blood and guts and plenty of sex? Nope. Is it simply wonderful writing. As simple and boring as that. Does that mean that I was incredibly disappointed in the movie adaptation (not to say abortion)? Yep. Does that mean I don't love Game of Thrones (books and TV shows)? No, they are great too. But the seminal work, the Divine Comedy that created the language and inspiration for George R.R. Martin as Dante created Italian from the common vernacular in Florence and Ravenna, was The Hobbit. The book, even for a slow reader is most likely able to be finished in 1/3 the time that Peter Jackson spent telling the story in 70mm film. Unlike Peter Jackson's version, there are no orcs and the element of danger is more psychological than psychical: Bilbo Baggins is battling his fears and his provincialism and growing up. The Hobbit should be read as the Odyssey of Middle Earth - a voyage of self-learning and maturation that is more about the monsters in Bilbo's imagination than those encountered in his baptismal voyage into the unknown with Gandalf. Gandalf. Honestly, would there EVER have been a Dumbledore had there not been a Gandalf? Did any Tolkien reader not NOT picture Gandalf when Rowlings talked about Gandalf in the first Harry Potter book?

Bilbo does encounter some monsters and even outsmarts Smaug the Dragon (wow, I mean what a perfect name for a dragon! More evocative than Drogon, Rhaegal, and Viserion in my opinion - and again would they even have existed had Smaug not preceded them?) and he saves Middle Earth before returning to the Shire. He is not the same person he was before leaving. He is Ulysses without a Penelope waiting for him (unless his pipe is secretly called Penelope in his expanded imagination).

In literature, there is nothing quite like the Hobbit in its simplicity and beauty and its symbolic voyage: we are of course introduced to the elves, the humans, the dwarves...but they are all on the outskirts of the story. The Hobbit is about one small hobbit fighting his greatest fears...and winning.

Scott says

There are some days when I actually think that the humble *Hobbit* is superior to its bohemian brother, *The Lord of the Rings*. It's a much tighter story, and Bilbo is a much more appealing character than is Frodo. I also just love this poem, from *The Hobbit*

Far over the misty mountains cold
To dungeons deep and caverns old
We must away ere break of day
To seek the pale enchanted gold.

The dwarves of yore made mighty spells,
While hammers fell like ringing bells
In places deep, where dark things sleep,
In hollow halls beneath the fells.

For ancient king and elvish lord
There many a gleaming golden hoard
They shaped and wrought, and light they caught
To hide in gems on hilt of sword.

On silver necklaces they strung
The flowering stars, on crowns they hung
The dragon-fire, in twisted wire
They meshed the light of moon and sun.

Far over the misty mountains cold
To dungeons deep and caverns old
We must away, ere break of day,
To claim our long-forgotten gold.

Goblets they carved there for themselves
And harps of gold; where no man delves
There lay they long, and many a song
Was sung unheard by men or elves.

The pines were roaring on the height,
The winds were moaning in the night.
The fire was red, it flaming spread;
The trees like torches blazed with light.

The bells were ringing in the dale
And men looked up with faces pale;
The dragon's ire more fierce than fire
Laid low their towers and houses frail.

The mountain smoked beneath the moon;
The dwarves, they heard the tramp of doom.
They fled their hall to dying fall
Beaneath his feet, beneath the moon.

Far over the misty mountains grim
To dungeons deep and caverns dim
We must away, ere break of day,
To win our harps and gold from him

Traveller says

Maybe one day soon I'll write a proper review of The Hobbit.

In the meantime, I want to say this:
If you are a child, you need to read this for Gollum's riddles.

If you are an adult, you need to read this book to children (if you don't have children, ~~rent~~ borrow some) for at least one opportunity to roleplay Gollum.

Becuz **GOLLUM ROOOLZ!!!!**

See here, he even won an award!!

(PS. Since Gollum features so strongly in this review, **here** is an interesting video on the acting and CGI genius that went into the making of the screen Gollum.)

Of course the most compelling reason to add this to your reading list in haste is that it's coming to the MOOVIEZZZ!! (Update: commentary on the moviez below).

Btw, if you like kickass fighting elves, not to mention pretty kickass she-elves and some sizzling elf/dwarf romance--well, then you might like the second Hobbit movie more than the book... ahem!

Part 3 coming to a cinema house near you soon(-ish). My PRECCIOOOUUSSSSS!
...and soon I'll have a copy of the all the moviez, and they will be me MINE, *all mine*, just like my precciousss illustrated copies of the novel.

Ha, you didn't think one copy would be enough did you??

If you get around used bookstores a lot, do look out for an illustrated version of the book!

Update: About the 3 films by Peter Jackson: I didn't find the first 2 films very memorable. He seemed to draw it out almost unbearably, and it also felt to me as if he was embellishing the original story a bit.

The whole thing seemed like actiony rubbish, though I personally actually quite enjoyed the swinging, shooting, swordfighting ninja elves and the bit of romance.

But the THIRD film, *The Battle of the Five Armies*, now -that- was a good one. I almost missed it on the big screen because of the mediocrity of the first two films. But I was glad, oh so glad that I actually did go and see it. The cinematics, acting and editing was all very well done, but it was the screenwriting and directing that really shone.

Here we saw a story of courage and cowardice; of generosity; of greed and avarice; of greatness of soul and of smallness of soul; of love; of selflessness; of brotherhood; of hatred; of humanity; of pain; of sacrifice; of struggle; of moral and spiritual victories; of sadness and loss, but above all, of triumph of the soul.

Yes, *The Battle of the Five Armies* is certainly something that does Tolkien justice at the very least, and what a joy it was to behold on the big screen. :)

PS. The movies also taught us that dwarves CAN be hot!

Sean Barrs the Bookdragon says

To call this the epitome in which all high fantasy should be judged does not quite suffice; this is simply one of the best books that has ever been written or will ever be written. *The Hobbit* defines the high fantasy genre along with its sequel, of course, and has been an inspiration to countless authors and readers alike. Tolkien, quite literally, kick started a genre that would eventually capture the hearts of thousands of people. He changed the literary world. He made fantasy real.

The best fantasy universe ever created

Middle Earth is undoubtedly the best fantasy universe created. It is the most original and richly devised. It is very hard for fantasy authors not to borrow elements from Tolkien. He set the definition with his wonderful world. Tolkien's references to modern day are also very amusing and almost unnoticeable in the brilliant narrative, but a perceptive reader will notice the whimsical contrasts he has drawn between his world and the real world. The sheer depth of Tolkien's imagination is really unmeasurable. I wonder what other ideas for books he may have had that he never got to write.

"The road goes ever on and on"

Bilbo, like the reader, is blown away by the breath-taking landscape of Middle Earth. We must remember that he too is experiencing the majesty of Rivendell and the mightiness of Erebor for the first time. His reaction reflects a reader who is also awestruck by a world that is as beautifully magical as it is corrupt and wicked; it is a world in which both the benevolent and the malignant reside; it is a world whose people are capable of both great kindness and equally as great cruelty. The peoples are diverse and contrasting; I think the differences between the elves and the dwarves are best captured in their music. The music of the elves is full of mirth and is generally quite playful whereas the music of the dwarves is strong, deep and full of resolve to match their stubborn nature.

The wonderful, wonderful, story

This story belongs to Bilbo Baggins. This is something I think Peter Jackson would do well to remember, but that's beside the point. The tale begins as Bilbo accidentally, unexpectedly, invites Gandalf for tea the next day after a brief encounter. The Wizard marks him as the fourteenth member of his company, his burglar. Bilbo doesn't really understand what he is getting himself in for when he agrees to join their mission. Indeed, the next evening thirteen dwarves, headed by Thorin Oakenshield, arrive along with their quest to reclaim their gold and slay a dragon: Smaug. Smaug has stolen their home fortress of Erebor. They want it back. Bilbo reluctantly gets dragged along though this reluctance is quickly overcome by a strong, secret, desire for adventure.

"I am looking for someone to share in an adventure that I am arranging, and it's very difficult to find anyone.'

I should think so — in these parts! We are plain quiet folk and have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner!"

The story becomes darker as they close in on the mountain. The company are attacked by spiders and abducted by the wood elves who want a share of the dwarfish treasure. The dwarves begin to rely on their burglar who they believed would become a liability. How wrong they were. Bilbo was destined to come along. They would have surely failed if he had not, and the ring of power may never have been destroyed. But, that's another wonderful story. The game of riddles and the finding of the ring is one of the more memorable scenes of the book and is Bilbo's gateway into heroism. I think the power he receives from the ring helps him to discover that not only does he have courage and fortitude, but he has lots of it. Gandalf, if anything, is an excellent judge of character.

The ending is just the beginning

The ending of this book is undeniably rushed. Bilbo is unconscious for most of it, and we receive a post battle update. There are off page deaths and victories. In this, I think Tolkien cements the message of the story; it is not about the tragic death of a dwarf who went slightly mad, and then redeemed himself; it is not about a boatman who slayed a dragon, and became a renowned hero: it is about a Hobbit. This is Bilbo's story and no other's. It is a story in which a Hobbit who had no courage and no bravery found it. It is a story about a hobbit who was too scared to leave his house without a hanky eventually evolved into a Hobbit that would trick a dragon.

“You have nice manners for a thief and a liar,” said the dragon.”

It also sets the readership up for a sequel. If Tolkien focused too much on the dwarfish storyline at the end then the focus of the story would have appeared different. It may have shocked the reader that the sequel was about more Hobbits and not about the Dwarves. This, again, is something Peter Jackson did not realise. I know this is a book review of the Hobbit, but what better place than here to share my distain for that terrible trilogy that Jackson recently farted out? This is Bilbo's story, not Thorin's and certainly not Legolas'. This book is called the Hobbit not the hobbit, the dwarf and that elf with the cool sword.

“In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.”

Furthermore, I read this first when I was twelve years old and again now. I am not sure at which time I enjoyed it the most! This is a book that I will read many more times in my life and it is also book that I will never stop enjoying, no matter how many more times I read it. Also if you like this book as much as me I recommend reading The Art of the Hobbit. I think this captures Tolkien's vision of Middle Earth more than any artist or movie maker ever could. Alan Lee's work is more artistic, but Tolkien's is from the most original source: himself.

Five stars. I think you know why.

The original cover of the Hobbit, as painted by Tolkien:

Ahmad Sharabiani says

610. The Hobbit = There and Back Again, J.R.R. Tolkien

The Hobbit, or There and Back Again is a children's fantasy novel by English author J. R. R. Tolkien. It was published on 21 September 1937 to wide critical acclaim, being nominated for the Carnegie Medal and awarded a prize from the New York Herald Tribune for best juvenile fiction. The book remains popular and is recognized as a classic in children's literature.

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Matt says

Some books are almost impossible to review. If a book is bad, how easily can we dwell on its flaws! But if the book is good, how do you give any recommendation that is equal the book? Unless you are an author of equal worth to the one whose work you review, what powers of prose and observation are you likely to have to fitly adorn the work?

'The Hobbit' is at one level simply a charming adventure story, perhaps one of the most charming and most adventurous ever told. There, see how simple that was? If you haven't read it, you should, because it is quite enjoyable. At some level, there is little more to say. Enjoy the story as the simple entertainment it was meant to be. Read it to your children and luxuriate in the excitement and joy that shines from their faces. That's enough.

But if it was only simple entertainment, I do not think that it would be anything more than just a good book. Instead, this simple children's story resonates and fascinates. It teases and hints at something larger and grander, and it instructs and lectures as from one of the most subtle intellects without ever feeling like it is instructing, lecturing or being condescending.

At its heart, the complaint I opened the review with is just a variation on one of the many nuanced observations Tolkien makes in 'The Hobbit' when he complains that a story of a good time is always too quickly told, but a story of evil times often requires a great many words to cover the events thereof. How often has that idea fascinated me.

Consider also how the story opens, with Bilbo's breezy unreflective manners which are polite in form but not in spirit, and Gandalf's continual meditation on the meaning of 'Good morning.' How much insight is concealed within Gandalf's gentle humor! How often do we find ourselves, like Bilbo, saying something we don't really mean and using words to mean something very unlike their plain meaning! How often do we find ourselves saying, "I don't mean to be rude, but...", when in fact we mean, "I very much mean to be rude, and here it comes!" If we did not mean to be rude, surely we wouldn't say what we say. Instead we mean, "I'm going to be rude but I don't want you to think I'm someone who is normally rude...", or "I'm going to put myself forward, but I don't want you to think of me as someone who is normally so arrogant...", or even, "I'm going to be rude, but I don't want to think of myself as someone who is rude, so I'm going to pretend I'm not being rude..."

I think that is what makes this more than just a good book, but a great one. Tolkien is able to gently skewer us for our all too human failings, and he does so without adopting any of the cynicism or self-loathing so common with those that seek out to skewer humanity for its so evident failings.

We fantasize about heroes which are strong and comely of form, and we have for as long as we've had recorded literature. Our comic books are filled with those neo-pagan mythic heroes whose exaggerated human virtues always amount to, whatever else may be true of them, 'beats people up good'. These modern Ajaxs, Helens and Achilles dominate the box office, and I would imagine dominate our internal most private fantasy lives as well. Oh sure, the superhero of our fantasy might have superhuman ethics to go along with his superhuman ability to kick butt, attract the opposite sex, and enforce their will upon others, but it is always attached to and ultimately secondary to our fantasy of power and virility. How different is Tolkien's protagonist from Heracles, Lancelot, Beowulf, or Batman - short, small, mundane, and weak. Of all the principal characters of the story, he possesses probably the least of that quintessential heroic attribute - martial prowess.

And yet, he is not actually merely an 'average Joe'. Bilbo is just as much an exaggerated idealized hero as Heracles, it's just that those attributes in which Bilbo is almost transcendently inhuman isn't the sort of attributes we normally fantasize about having ourselves. Bilbo is gentle. He is simple. He is humble. Power and wealth have little attraction for him. He is kind. He takes less than his share, and that that he takes he gives away. He is a peacemaker. Though wrongly imprisoned, he bears no grudge and desires no vengeance for the wrongs done to him. Rather he apologizes for stealing food, and offers to repay in recompense far more than he took. Though mistreated, he harbors no enmity. He never puts himself forward, but he never

shirks when others do.

How often do we fantasize about being this different sort of hero, and yet how much better we would be if we did? How much better off would we be if we, like Thorin could declare in our hearts, "There is more in you of good than you know, child of the kindly West. Some courage and some wisdom, blended in measure. If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world." How often is it that we hunger after all the wrong things? What profit would we really have if we had in great measure the power to 'beat people up good'? What real use could we put it too? How much better off would we be individually and as a people if we most desired to be graced with Bilbo's virtues, rather than Achilles speed, strength, and skill with arms? How much less mature does this mere children's book of a well lit-world cause our darker fantasies to seem?

Now, I admit I am biased in my review. I read this book 36 times before the age of 16. I broke the spines of three copies of it with continual reading. Yet in my defense I will say that I'm considered only a moderate fan of the book by many. I've known several devotees of the book who, like the protagonist of Bradbury's 'Fahrenheit 451', can recite whole chapters from memory - ensuring that this would be one of the few books that would survive the sudden destruction of all the world's technology if only the world's story tellers survived. If you are inclined to think no book can be that good, and that my review overhypes it, so much the better. Go in with low expectations so as to be certain that they will be met or exceeded. Forget all I have said save that, "If you haven't read it, you should, because it is quite enjoyable."

Joe says

This book?
Precious.

Hannah Greendale says

Click here to watch a video review of this book on my channel, *From Beginning to Bookend*.

Were it not for the irresistible allure of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, I'd start reading this book all over again right now. <3

Ana O says

The book is almost always better than the movie, and The Hobbit is the prime example of this sentiment.

I have spoken.

Inge says

Dear Tolkien fans: please don't leave a comment if you're going to spew hatred - I'll just delete it. I'm glad you enjoy Tolkien's work, but I am actually allowed to feel this way, no matter how scandalous you find that idea. Thank you.

To be fair, it really *is* a cool story. Mr Tolkien's imagination is endless and I respect him immensely for that. To be able to conjure a whole new, magical world and all these creatures in it.. absolutely amazing. But it is also a very long-winded story and I found myself struggling to get the *job* done. Reading is not supposed to be a job; it's supposed to be fun and relaxing. For me, *The Hobbit* was not an engaging story – I was distracted constantly and kept missing paragraphs. The story in itself is pretty great, but the way it is told makes the magic disappear. I am not quite sure how to explain. Maybe it was the way it was written, or the fact that they take a long time before anything happens. I should also mention the highly anticlimactic end of Smaug, and the fact that I can't tell any of the dwarves apart. And the *songs*! Dear Merlin, *the songs*! I felt like I was in a ruddy musical.

I'm sad that I didn't like it as much. I wish I did. In any case, still a cool story.

Will Byrnes says

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.

Books exist in time and place and our experience of them is affected by the specific time and place in which we encounter them. Sometimes an uplifting or inspiring book can change the path of a life that has wandered onto a wrong course. Sometimes a book, discovered early on, can form part of the foundation of who we are. Or, discovered late, can offer insight into the journey we have taken to date. Sometimes a book is just a book. But not *The Hobbit*. Not for me. In January, 2013, I pulled out my forty-year old copy in anticipation of seeing the recently released Peter Jackson film. It is a substantial book, heavy, not only with its inherent mass, but for the weight of associations, the sediment of time. The book itself is a special hard-cover edition published in 1973, leather bound, in a slipcase, the booty of new love from that era. The book, while victim to some internal binding cracks (aren't we all?) is still in decent shape, unlike that long-vanquished relationship. Not surprising. I had read the story six times and been there and back again with this particular volume five.

J.R.R. Tolkien - image from Vision.org

The Hobbit had first come to my attention in 1965 or '66. I was then a high school underclassman, and my eyes were drawn to it at a school book fair. That was probably the ideal age, for me anyway, to gain an

introduction to Tolkien. Not too far along into adolescence and an appreciation of the reality of the world to have completely tarnished my capacity for child-like wonder. That is what one must bring to a reading of this book, openness and innocence. Tolkien was a step sidewise for me, as I was a fan of the science fiction of that and prior eras. It was also, of course, a gateway drug for the grander addiction of LOTR, still my favorite read of all time.

One might think that looking at this book again with ~~old, weary~~ fresh eyes might lend new insight. After all, I have read literally thousands of books since, and have picked up at least a little critical capacity. And yes, there are things I notice now that perhaps skipped past back then. Of course that begs a specification of which *back then* one considers. While I first read the book as a high-schooler, I read it again when I was gifted with this beautiful volume, in my twenties. That makes two readings. But there would be more. I well recall reading the book aloud while sitting in a chair by my son's bed. And yes, each of the major characters was delivered with a distinct voice. I went as deep as I could for Gandalf. I vaguely recall giving the dwarves a Scottish burr. Bilbo was definitely a tenor. My Gollum was remarkably like the sound of the one created by Andy Serkisssss. (patting self on back).

Of course, my son was not the last to arrive at the gathering. Some years later there was a daughter, and more bedside theater. It was a bit more of a struggle then. Life was rather hectic. Nerves were often frayed. Sleep was in short supply. And there were far too many times when my eyes closed before those of my little gingersnap. But reading it that fourth time, one couldn't help but notice the absence of any significant females. Who might my little girl relate to here? It is certainly possible for folks to identify with characters of another gender, but the stark absence of representatives of the female persuasion did stand out. Somehow I managed to keep my eyes open long enough to get through the volume.

But the party was not yet complete. There would be one more arrival, and one more opportunity to sit on or near a daughter's bed and read aloud, sometimes to an upturned, eager face, sometimes to a riot of ringlets as she settled. My capacity for consciousness remained an issue. By then, my voice had also suffered a bit with the years, the reward for too many cigarettes, too much yelling, too much ballpark whistling, and the usual demise of age, so it took a fair bit more effort and strain than reading it aloud had done previously. I am pretty certain I made it through that third time aloud. Truthfully, I am not 100% certain that I did.

You probably know the story, or the broad strokes anyway. In the quiet rural village of Hobbiton Across the Water, in a land called Middle Earth, an unpresupposing everyman, Bilbo Baggins, lives a quiet existence. He has a smidgen of wanderlust in him, the genetic gift of ancestors on the Took branch of his family tree, but he is mostly content to enjoy hearty meals and a good pipe. One day, Gandalf, a lordly, father-figure wizard Bilbo has known for many years, comes a-calling and Bilbo's life is upended. Gandalf is helping a group of dwarves who are on a quest. Led by Thorin Oakenshield, a dwarf king, they aim to return to their home, inside the Lonely Mountain, somehow rid the place of Smaug, the dragon who has taken up residence, and regain the land and incredible treasure that is rightfully theirs. Gandalf has recommended that Bilbo accompany the group, as a burglar. Bilbo, of course, has never burgled a thing in his life, and is horrified by the prospect. But, heeding his Tookish side, Bilbo joins the dwarves and the adventure is on.

One need not go far to see this as a journey of self-discovery, as Bilbo finds that there is more to him than even he realized. This raises one question for me. How did Gandalf know that Bilbo would be the right hobbit for the job? Bilbo faces many challenges and I betray no secrets for any who have not just arrived on this planet by reporting that Bilbo's dragons, real and symbolic, are ultimately slain and he returns home a new, and somewhat notorious hobbit. Bilbo serves well as the everyman, someone who is quite modest about his capacities, but who rises to meet the challenges that present, acting in spite of his fear and not in the

absence of it. He is someone we can easily care and root for.

Elements abound of youthful adventure yarns, treasure, a map to the treasure, a secret entrance that requires solving a riddle to gain entry, a spooky forest, foolishness and greed among those in charge, a huge battle, and, ultimately, good sense triumphing over evil and stupidity. Oh, yeah, there is something in there as well about a secret, powerful ring that can make it's wearer invisible. Sorry, no damsels in distress.

(Rivendell remains a pretty special place. If I am ever fortunate enough to be able to retire, I think I would like to spend my final days there, whether the vision seen by Tolkien or the Maxfield Parrish take as seen in the LOTR films.)

There are magical beings aplenty here. Hobbits, of course, and the wizard and dwarves we meet immediately. A shape shifting Beorn assists the party but remains quite frightening. There are trolls, giant spiders, giants, goblins, were-wolf sorts called wargs, talking eagles, a communicative, if murderous dragon, elves of both the helpful and difficult sorts, and a few men, as well. Then there is Gollum.

IMHO, Bilbo is not the most interesting character in Tolkien's world. Arguably there is a lot more going on with Gollum, an erstwhile hobbit riven by the internal conflict of love and hate, corrupted, but not without a salvageable soul. While he is given considerably more ink in the LOTR story, it is in *The Hobbit* that we meet him for the first time. He is the single least YA element in this classic yarn, one of the things that elevates this book from the field and makes it a classic.

The Hobbit was written before Tolkien's ambitious Lord of the Rings. While there are many references to classic lore, the bottom line is that this is a YA book. It is easy to read, and to read aloud, (something that is not the case with LOTR. I know.) and is clearly intended for readers far younger than I am today. It remains a fun read, even on the sixth (or so, I may have dipped in again somewhere along the line) time through. Were I reading it today for the first time, I would probably give it four stars. But as it bears the weighty treasure of memory and fond association, I must keep it at five. If you are reading this for the first time as an adult, or an antique, the impact is likely to be different for you. If you are a younger sort, of the adolescent or pre-adolescent persuasion, particularly if you are a boy, it might become an invaluable part of your life. Maybe one day you can sit by your child's or grandchild's bedside and be the person who reads these words to them for the first time, "*In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit*" and begin the adventure again. To see the glowing young eyes as the tale unfolds is nothing less than absolutely precious.

PS – I would check out the review offered by GR pal Ted. He includes in his review outstanding, informative and very entertaining excerpts and comments re info on *The Hobbit* from JRRT's son Christopher.

=====EXTRA STUFF

Here is a lovely article on JRRT, from Smithsonian Magazine, January 2002

In comment #32, below, GR pal Rand added a link to a reading of the entire book by Nicol Williamson. It is just the thing for bedtime, yours or your child's. Adding it here was done with Rand's kind permission.

Ben Alderson says

JUST AMAZING! FUN AND BEAUTIFUL ADVENTURE!
I HAD TO READ THE END AGAIN BECAUSE OF MY LOVE
how they made three films out of this impresses me!
