

# **HEROES OF MIDDLE EARTH: THE HOBBIT**

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by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Heroes of Middle Earth: The Hobbit

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In J.R.R. Tolkien's novels, the Hobbit is a critical character that is used for the most difficult of tasks, not due to his heroic qualities, but because of the fundamental Hobbit-values of comfort and community; neither of which can be manipulated by Evil. It is this lack of manipulability that vaults the Hobbits into the title of hero. The creation history of Middle Earth culminates with Sauron creating the Ring of Power. Sauron creates a Ring filled with his soul, and with it, spreads darkness and discord across Middle Earth: thus giving rise to the Fellowship of the Ring, a collection of all Middle Earth's peoples: Wizards, Elves, Dwarves, Men, and Hobbits, who will support the Ringbearer's journey to the Crack of Doom and destroy the Ring and its master Sauron. Gandalf is the most powerful Wizard on Middle Earth and is motivated by pity for mankind, but he cannot carry the Ring to Mordor because he would become a newer version of Sauron; one that would remove free-will and disguise evil deeds with good intentions. The Elves are good beings designed out of love; however, the Ring manipulates and magnifies the Elves existing faults of greed, vanity, and hunger for power; thus the Elven-kind cannot bear the Ring to Mordor without first falling victim to their own selfish desires. The Dwarves of

Middle Earth are also selfish and greedy; however, their vices would not create a new power-hungry ruler of Middle Earth but would prevent the Ring from ever leaving the Misty Mountains: which defeats the purpose of the quest. Men (and their descendants- Hobbits) are the only beings gifted with free-will and are by nature, prone to doing bad deeds often out of greed or power-hunger. Of all the races, Men are the easiest to manipulate and would make terrible Ringbearers because of this easy manipulability. This leaves only Hobbits, of whom four are Ringbearers. Hobbit flaws are unmanipulable because their values center around the comforts of life and family. All four Ring-bearing Hobbits are successful in their task to carry the Ring to Mordor, even Smeagol, whose deeds are often amoral and deceitful. It is because of the Hobbit hero that Sauron is defeated, and it is not their ordinariness or “unlikely hero” traits that make them good Ringbearers, but their contentedness with their humble lives that makes them perfectly suited to carry the One Ring.

## **DEDICATION**

*To my instructors, friends, and family who supported me throughout the research process and listened to all my Tolkienian theories.*

*And in loving memory to Charles A. Rohan, Sr. (1952-2006), for inspiring my love for fantasy literature.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Hobbit is often described as an unlikely hero, or everyman hero, a description suggesting that the Hobbit is not meant to be a hero but is one by chance or circumstance. An unlikely hero is a hero who does not look like a traditional hero (Beowulf, Odysseus, or King Arthur), and must grow into the role of hero, typically through an unexpected adventure. Some scholars even classify Hobbits as reluctant heroes because they do not want to take up the adventuring mantle, but must anyway. This heroic archetype is used very generally based on appearance and behavior, and as such, does not fully encapsulate the merit of the Hobbit hero. By classifying the Hobbit as an unlikely hero, scholars overlook the Hobbit values and how they relate to the quest at hand, thus simplifying and reducing the Hobbit to its appearance.

Prior criticism of J.R.R. Tolkien's Hobbit heroes, is focused primarily on the relationships between power and linguistics (Janet Croft and David Day), Middle Earth and the 20th century (Verlyn Flieger), Smeagol as a hero (David Callaway and Elizabeth Arthur), religion and heroism (Tom Shippey and Christopher Snyder), and morality and fate (Edith Crowe and Verlyn Flieger). This project explores the relationship between power and morality as they relate to heroism within the Hobbit character, while also expanding current knowledge of the Hobbit hero as the only possible hero of Middle Earth.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's novels, the Hobbit is a critical character used for the most difficult tasks, not due to the traditionally understood heroic qualities, but because of the fundamental Hobbit-values of comfort and community; both of which cannot be manipulated by Evil. It is this lack of manipulability that vaults the Hobbits into the title of hero. The Unlikely Hero Archetype is a character that does not look or act in a heroic manner but is thrust into the role of hero. This

thesis will argue against the general position of the Hobbit hero in Tolkien's works as an Unlikely Hero, based on their hobbit traits that make them ideal for their roles as heroes.

# 1. HISTORY OF MIDDLE EARTH

## 1.1 Creation of Middle Earth

The depth of Tolkien's Hobbit hero can best be understood by knowing Middle Earth's history, which Tolkien tells in *The Silmarillion* beginning with the start of time; when "Eru, the One" (also called Ilúvatar), the omniscient God of Eä (the Universe), creates the Ainur and of these come the Valar, the Holy Ones and the Powers of the World respectively (15). Each of these Ainur encompasses a facet of Ilúvatar's mind, but among them Melkor "[is] given the greatest gifts of power and knowledge, and he [has] a share in all the gifts of his brethren" (*The Silmarillion* 16).

Tolkien's creation story begins when Ilúvatar sings to the Ainur the theme of His will, he commands them to combine voices and powers in "adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices" (*The Silmarillion* 15). The Great Music of the Ainur is harmonious and beautiful, echoing "out into the Void, and it [is] not Void" (*The Silmarillion* 15).

Melkor, however, has different plans from his creator, and he warps the theme. Into it, he sings darkness, impatience, pride, vanity, and violence; drowning his brethren's chorus with wrath when it refuses to bend to the darkness. Speaking of Melkor's darkness Janet Croft says, "Arda [or Middle Earth,] is Morgoth's Ring, with his power infusing the whole world", unlike his future successor Sauron, whose world is the One Ring (81). Arda is at the mercy of Melkor because the "linguistic act of naming is extraordinarily metaphoric, for as Morgoth names Arda to himself, it becomes both a physical extension of his own power, and inseparably a part of himself" (Croft 84). It can be implied that this claiming of Arda sets up Melkor's great flaw – the whole of Arda is also Melkor and annihilating the world to spite Ilúvatar will ultimately

annihilate himself as well: but also, it sets up the future antagonist Sauron – whose power is magnified in the One Ring (and nonexistent without the One Ring), thus separating himself from what he seeks to rule, as it gives Sauron great power that is not really power he owns.

In Melkor's defiance he identifies himself as the evil in Middle Earth, much like a dragon is the adversary to the epic hero. Tolkien says a great dragon is "a personification of malice, greed, destruction" and is "the evil side of heroic life:" Melkor and his darkness are these great dragons, monstrous beasts of destruction and hatred ("Beowulf: The Monsters" 17). As an omniscient god, Ilúvatar knows Melkor and knows what he will bring, for he made Melkor of that mind; and as such, he paved the way for a balancing hero whom mercy and charity come easily against these dragons: the Hobbit.

Tolkien tells us that Melkor challenges Ilúvatar in three chords; the first chord, Melkor sows darkness in the world in opposition to the Ainur; the second, Ilúvatar uses Manwë as his champion in the lyrical battle between light and darkness, for Manwë and Melkor are brothers in thought; the third chord, Melkor is defeated by Ilúvatar himself in "one chord" of immense power (*The Silmarillion* 17). Ilúvatar's product of the third chord is the Children: the Firstborn, Elves, and the Followers, Men.

After Melkor's defeat, Tolkien dictates the fundamental truths of Ilúvatar's will, saying:

And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my spite. For he that attempteth this shall prove mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful. Which he himself hath not imagined. (*The Silmarillion* 17)

Melkor is ashamed and angry at being bested by Ilúvatar, so he turns to rule other beings, often perverting the good creations of his fellow Ainur to suit him. Melkor begins with his pursuit of

Light, to be the only one to keep it and pervert it to his own twisted imaginings. Varda the wife of Manwë and the Lady of Light, refuses Melkor when they are created; thus, he thrives in the Darkness and builds his evil creations devoid of all light, both literally and metaphorically.

## **1.2 Fall of Morgoth**

When Melkor is cast out from Ilúvatar's presence, he brings loyal followers with him to Arda (the World). Melkor hides for many years on Arda where he waits in his fortress Utumno. He strikes at the Valar, destroying the two Lamps of Varda and plunging Arda into darkness. The fire of the lamps reshapes Arda by marring the Valar's creation and saps the Valar's powers as they prevent the complete destruction of Arda. The Valar then choose to leave and settle in a new place- Aman, so they can fortify a new home away from Middle Earth and recuperate their power. Yavanna (Vala of Growing Nature) uses her power to plant two saplings and Nienna (Vala of Mercy and Pity), with mercy for the world and sorrow, waters the saplings with her tears: bringing the light of the two trees into Valinor (Quenya word for Aman). The Two trees bring permanent light to Arda: one of golden fire and the other of silver dew. And so, ends the Spring of Arda, the time after Melkor's exile and before the Children (the Elves and later, Men).

Eventually, the Children awake: only to be found by Melkor as he wanders through the darkness. Here he corrupts many of the Quendi, firstborn Elves, with slow torture until all that remains are abominations who know only hatred- both for themselves and their master. After committing "the vilest... and the most hateful" sin against Ilúvatar, corrupting the Firstborn and destroying them, Melkor "forfeit[s]" his name and becomes Morgoth: the Dark enemy of the World (*The Silmarillion* 50, 31). This begins a great war, and Melkor maintains the upper hand by using his dark creatures to weaken the Valar.

In the War of the Powers the Valar attack Melkor, and for decades they battle for the sake of the Children. Melkor is defeated in Utumno and is brought to Valinor as prisoner. His sentence is imprisonment for 3000 years, which becomes known as the Noontide of the Blessed Realm (*The Silmarillion* 63).

## 2. WIZARDS AND ISTARI

Before the creation of Arda, Ilúvatar created the Ainur: The Holy Ones. These Ainur are comprised of Valar, the Powers of the World, and Maiar, the People of the Valar. These Maiar are “servants and helpers” to the Valar, and their primary purpose is to help the Valar grow the world (*The Silmarillion* 30). The Powers and People do not have the power to create life, for only Ilúvatar holds the Imperishable Flame, their role in building Middle Earth is to take the foundation of Arda and mold it into a blossoming world.

Of these Maiar, some choose to follow Melkor and his promise of power. This power of destruction and authority cannot be given by Melkor, yet, his followers are enamored with the prospect of ruling other beings. There is no clear number of how many Maiar exist, nor how many leave to be subservient to Melkor, but most of the Maiar choose to follow their creator Ilúvatar and serve his will. Of the Maiar that choose Darkness, the most “dreadful” become known as Valaraukar the “demons of terror:” Balrogs (*The Silmarillion* 31).

There are two Maiar significant to the history of the Ring: Sauron and Gandalf. The Maia Sauron, much like his predecessor Morgoth, chooses the path of darkness that guarantees the destruction of the world and its inhabitants. Gandalf, an Istari- a Maia sent to Middle-Earth to prevent Sauron’s return, leads the fellowship against Sauron instead of carrying the One Ring.

Each of the Maiar is made in Ilúvatar’s image, but because of their differences among one another the One Ring has a different allure for each Maia’s weakness. The Maiar, and subsequently the Istari, are unable to complete the quest because each is only a fraction of Ilúvatar’s thought and has only a limited understanding of Ilúvatar’s will, thus the Istari are

fallible and susceptible to the Ring's temptations of creating a better world. This fallibility in the Istari would give Sauron the opportunity to spread his darkness, even without a physical form on Arda, as explained by Saruman's (the Istari who leads the White Council) turn to darkness by the thought of power. Hundreds of years pass from Sauron's fall to the finding of the One Ring, giving the Men, Maiar, and Elves a false sense of security about the growing Darkness in Arda.

## **2.1 Sauron**

Mairon the Maia was a servant of Aulë (Vala of Smithing) before joining Morgoth; he then becomes known as Sauron or Gorthaur the Cruel during his time as Morgoth's second in command. During Morgoth's reign, Sauron lives in his master's shadow- taking part in the evil permeating Arda, but never leading the darkness. However, as David Callaway notes "[w]hat Eru tells Melkor, and which also must apply to Sauron (being a servant of Melkor), is that there is really no evil" and all dark deeds done are part of the greater plan (16). Sauron's desire to rule Arda, and the subsequent actions he takes, make him a pawn in the long game of Ilúvatar's will. After Morgoth is trapped in the Void, Sauron rises to power as a "ghost of [Melkor's] malice;" thus, further positioning himself as the new enemy needing defeat (*The Silmarillion* 32). Sauron believes he is making his own decisions, when in reality, the workings of Middle Earth are much like a play: Ilúvatar is the playwright, designing the stage and script; Sauron is the villain, reciting the script he was given but putting his own voice into the words; and the Hobbits, small heroes that are like extras- they are not given a script to follow and every choice is their own, because they (and Men) have free-will unlike the other peoples of Middle Earth- they walk the same stage that the playwright has made.

With Morgoth's defeat, Sauron is given the choice to repent and receive a punishment of "servitude in proof of his good faith" to the Valar (*The Silmarillion* 285). He refuses out of pride



and humiliation because he has been a respected general under Morgoth and would be beneath those of even his own order if he returned to Aman (*The Silmarillion* 285). Sauron goes into hiding on Middle Earth and continues to sway mankind to darkness.

Sauron has the ability to change his physical form because he is a Maia, a rare power even among the Maiar, and he presents himself to the Elves as Annatar, Lord of Gifts. His intentions are to deceive the Elves and acquire their trust (*The Silmarillion* 287). Sauron stays among the Elves of Ost-in-Edhil, where he helps the smiths create rings of power, unlike any smith-creation the world has ever seen. Sauron forges a master ring- one that can know and rule the others, and “much of the strength and will of Sauron passe[s] into that One Ring” because the “power of the Elven-rings [is] very great, and that which should govern them must be a thing of surpassing potency” (*The Silmarillion* 287). Tolkien says that the One Ring is “so powerful that in the end it would utterly overcome anyone of mortal race who possessed it” (“The Fellowship” 46). This One Ring will corrupt all who hold it, irrespective of race, then manipulate its bearer into fulfilling Sauron’s wishes; however, the Hobbits are hardier and “fade reluctantly” to Sauron’s will (“The Fellowship” 222).

Of the great Elven rings, three are saved and unsullied, but they still call the One Ring their master. Many years later when Isildur cuts the Ring off Sauron’s hand, Sauron is vanquished and his spirit “[forsakes]” his body and flees to the wastelands of Mordor (*The Silmarillion* 294). Sauron leaves the mortal plane, but as long as the Ring remains, he does as well; thus Sauron’s very soul, Imperishable Flame, lies within the Ring as a sentient being of its own that is not lesser to Sauron, but equal in thought and deed. Therefore, no being, including Sauron, can control the Ring. It is its own master but maintains allegiance to Sauron as being part of him. This One Ring to rule them all is the very ring that Smeagol finds and keeps,

inadvertently delaying the return of Sauron, that Bilbo steals, and that Frodo brings to the Crack of Doom.

## 2.2 Gandalf

As an Istari, Gandalf is a powerful, immortal being; however, he too has weaknesses. Gandalf the Wizard is a Maia by the name of Olórin, the servant of Varda and Nienna. He is asked to lead the Council of the Wise (a gathering of the lords of the Eldar and the Istari to prevent Sauron's return) in the search for Sauron and his Ring; however, Gandalf refuses claiming, "he would have no ties and no allegiance, save to those who sent him" to Middle Earth (*The Silmarillion* 300). While searching the lands for a whisper of Sauron's darkness, Gandalf chances upon the Hobbits; a charming, quiet folk who are stronger than they appear.

When the One Ring is found by Bilbo in *The Hobbit*, Gandalf watches the young Hobbit and convinces him to leave it to his nephew Frodo when he is ready to retire. Frodo knows nothing of the Ring nor of its power and naively offers it to Gandalf. Gandalf is shocked and says:

No! ... With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly... Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is pity, pity for weakness and the desire for strength to do good... The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength. I shall have such need of it.

("The Fellowship" 61)

His words reveal Gandalf's weakness is pity for Men, a value he acquires in his time with Nienna, thus, Gandalf knows and hears the sorrows of mankind (*The Silmarillion* 30-31). The Ring does not call to Gandalf through power or darkness, but through this weakness. Tolkien

states that Gandalf “knows he cannot carry the Ring” (“The Fellowship” 61), and one might even assume that to do so would corrupt his good intentions and perhaps even set his heart to crave power. Tolkien suggests that Gandalf is one of the most powerful beings on Middle Earth and might have the power to “master” Sauron, thus ridding Arda of evil permanently (*The Letters* 332). However, the cost of fighting the Ring for control would be his own strength, and thus weakened, the implication is that the Ring would then use him for dark deeds with no chance of being stopped.

Gandalf is a mighty adversary to Sauron, but Tolkien says, “Gandalf as a Ring-Lord would have been far worse than Sauron. He would have remained ‘righteous’, but self-righteous” ruling Arda with order and greatness, and his rule would make the good seem evil (*The Letters* 332-333). For Tolkien, good intentions do not equal good outcomes, because good intentions often lead to a perverted sense of goodness. Gandalf’s weakness is pity for the plights of Men; thus, Gandalf cannot carry the One Ring and must instead, lead the true Ringbearer to Mordor.

### 3. ELVES

The race of Elves is created from the Third Chord in Ilúvatar's battle against Morgoth. From the moment of their awakening, the Elves have been tortured by the darkness in Middle-Earth. The Valar invite the Elves to live in Aman, free from Morgoth's dark deeds, but many of the Elves never complete the journey.

Tolkien says, the "doom" of the immortal Elves is "to love the beauty of the world, to bring it to full flower with their gifts of delicacy and perfection, to last while it lasts, never leaving it... and yet, when the Followers (Men) come, to teach them, and make way for them, to 'fade' as the Followers grow and absorb the life from which both proceed" (*The Letters* 147). However, the Elves' love for Arda and their passion for the art of nature prevents them from moving on to the Undying Lands.

With Ilúvatar's will for the Elven kind to leave Middle-Earth and his design for the Elves to love Middle-Earth, the divide between the Elves' obligation to fulfill Ilúvatar's will by going West and their own love for Arda is the weakness that Sauron and the Ring would exploit. Tolkien makes it clear that the One Ring offers an opportunity unique to the Elves: the ability to destroy the evil and darkness permeating Arda and grow Middle Earth for all eternity, as "[t]heir Fall is into possessiveness and... perversion of their art to power" (*The Silmarillion* 146). The Elven desire for power stems from vanity, that they alone have a love worthy to care for Arda. This misguided notion that they could do what is best for Middle Earth, better than Ilúvatar, stems from eternal love; however, in a letter Tolkien says that this love that is pure in intent will be warped into a madness and the Elves will desire to create a new "paradise" of equal beauty to

Valinor<sup>1</sup> (*The Letters* 152). Elves are heroic with timeless strength and infinite wisdom, but an Elf cannot be the true carrier of the One Ring because the Ring amplifies their worst qualities: vanity, greed, and a “hunger for power”- a fault the Elf whom Frodo offers the Ring, Lady Galadriel, balances with “renunciation” (Lakowski 101), paving the way for a greater Ringbearer in the steadfast Hobbits.

### 3.1 Galadriel

Lady Galadriel is one of the three most powerful and wisest beings on Middle-Earth, and yet, despite being a champion of the Elven race, her self-restraint and her soul are still tested with the power of the One Ring. Galadriel keeps the door “closed” to Sauron’s groping of her thoughts, but this does not protect her completely, and the testing of her heart proves that she “greatly desire[s]” the One Ring, for power and for the love of her people who will “forget and be forgotten” with its destruction (“The Fellowship” 365).

When Frodo offers her the Ring, she treats it as a joke and laughs, because she has enough awareness of her “creaturely limitations” to admit that she craves the power of the One Ring (Lakowski 100). This laughter is expressed as joy, a joy that “gives power to those who know that ultimate victory belongs to the side of goodness” (Chapman-Morales 61). Galadriel briefly understands her role in Ilúvatar’s will and what she must do: she must choose that path of goodness to truly see the higher path, a path of hope for the world, all beginning with joy as a “defiance to evil” (Chapman-Morales 61). It can be argued that Galadriel is joyful because she

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<sup>1</sup> It is Galadriel’s beautiful hair that inspires Fëanor to create the Silmarils, as her hair has captured the Light of the Two Trees. The Silmarils are gems that contain the Light of Trees, and the theft of these gems by Morgoth begins the war between Elves and Morgoth.

Fëanor was consumed with desire to recreate the Ilúvatar’s and the Valar’s creations, and he allowed himself to be swayed by Morgoth into defying Ilúvatar’s will. Fëanor and his sons all swear an oath to retrieve the gems, but the quest ends in tragedy for all involved- and the Silmarils are lost to the world forever. *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales* chronicle the Silmarils’s creation, theft, and the resulting war.

has a moment of clarity, a moment where the true weight of her choice is known, and Galadriel has the internal strength to accept her people's fate to fade away. Tolkien says with the Ring's power, she could be "beautiful and terrible," as "fair" as the Sea and as "dreadful as the storm," and "stronger" than the Earth itself; above all things, "all shall love [her] and despair," which is a desire that can only be imagined with an eternity's understanding of what can and will be ("The Fellowship" 366). This laughter at Frodo's offer is true and genuine, as she has just realized that she has already chosen the path of the Fellowship, implying that she has already seen in her mirror that Frodo will tempt her with the power of the One Ring, and she may either refuse or accept, and after her refusal she laughs again.

By refusing the temptation of the Ring, Galadriel also accepts her own future and the future of her people, because the One Ring is the only thing that can delay the Age of Men; thus, the Elves will be forgotten with time and must return to their true home across the Sea. The vanity and desire expressed in this moment perfectly encapsulate the danger of allowing an Elf to carry the Ring. Galadriel reins in her temptation-laden soul, but unlike most Elves remaining on Middle Earth, she is a wise Elf who is privileged with the trust of her entire race and the prized Elven ring Nenya (The Ring of Water crafted by Celebrimbor), and not another more ordinary Elf; she is a High Elf that has been to Valinor and has seen the Light of the Two Trees. By seeing the Two Trees, Galadriel is gifted with the light of Aman and keeps the "radiance of Laurelin" in her hair, bringing her a wisdom and understanding surpassing the Elves who have not seen the trees (*The Silmarillion* 61). Tolkien emphasizes that she is the "mightiest and fairest of all the Elves that remain in Middle-earth", tempted by very little- unlike her people who would be tempted by far less important things (*The Silmarillion* 298).

### 3.2 Thranduil

The Woodland King Thranduil does not encounter the One Ring, even though his son Legolas does as part of the fellowship. Thranduil is a minor antagonist in *The Hobbit* when the Dwarves are locked in the Mirkwood prisons. He is later, at the Battle of the Five Armies, the first Elf to give Bilbo Elvish blessings. In Bilbo's first encounter with the King of Mirkwood, the Dwarves are all imprisoned for being Dwarves, and Thranduil justifies this thinking by suggesting Dwarves build their wealth by stealing Elven treasures (*The Hobbit* 152). This innate distrust of Dwarves is indicative of the Elvish vanity and greed, as Thranduil is primarily interested in the treasures of Erebor.

While Galadriel is a High Elf, the Woodland King Thranduil is not; and as such, Thranduil's obsession with the gems in the Dwarven treasure in *The Hobbit* is an example of Elven earthly temptations, as Tolkien says, "[Thranduil] [has] a weakness, it [is] for treasure" (*The Hobbit* 152). Thranduil is filled with vanity and pride, particularly when it comes to hoards of gems and riches, and he "[is] ever eager for more [gems], since he [has] not yet as great a treasure as other elf-lords of old" (*The Hobbit* 152). Compared to Elrond and Galadriel whose desires are for the power to save the Elven race from fading, Thranduil is vain and greedy for mundane things.

As vain as Thranduil is, he bestows a great blessing upon Bilbo and complements his good nature saying, "[Bilbo] [is] more worthy to wear the armor of elf-princes than many that have looked more comely in it" (*The Hobbit* 244). As a hero, Bilbo exemplifies the values of selflessness and friendship; values that Elves struggle with upholding. The Elven king is pleased to declare Bilbo as Bilbo the Magnificent, and name him "elf-friend and blessed" (*The Hobbit* 263). This is an official recognition of the merits of the Hobbit hero, namely the Hobbit love for

friendship that inspires Bilbo to give up the Arkenstone, and to some degree, restore peace between the Elves and Dwarves.

Among Elves, only Elrond, Legolas, and Galadriel have a significant experience with the One Ring. Elrond leads the Council to send the Ring to Mordor, but he was also present when Sauron's finger was cut from his hand with Narsil during the Battle of Dagorlad ("The Fellowship" 243). Elrond does not force Isildur to destroy the Ring, as Men have free-will, and he does not take it from Isildur because he knows he cannot risk the Ring's corruption. Legolas, Thranduil's son, does not say anything about the One Ring or temptation. Galadriel is offered the Ring and refuses, signifying the fading of the Elves. Tolkien does not elaborate on Elrond or Legolas in relation to the Ring, so the statement that all beings will be corrupted by the Ring is the implied understanding of why Legolas or Elrond could not carry it.

The Elves are unable to carry the One Ring because their desire for a perfect world would drive them into power-hunger, to create as Ilúvatar created, and to achieve perfection though only Ilúvatar is perfect. For Elves, vanity is the primary fault, the desire to appear in a particular way to the rest of the world. Galadriel, Elrond, Thranduil, and Legolas's support of Bilbo and Frodo indicates their decision to support a Hobbit hero, and later, Hobbit Ringbearers.



## 4. DWARVES

The Beowulfian aspects of ferocity, loyalty, and skill with weapons makes Dwarves heroic, but it is greed that separates this classic heroism from Tolkien's Ringbearer heroes. David Funk says that the psychology of Tolkien's Dwarves "reveal[s]: stubbornness, avarice, secretiveness and a reluctance to admit to the competence of others, at least in the areas of Dwarvish expertise" (331). As clearly mentioned in *The Hobbit*, "Dwarves are not heroes, but calculating folk with a great idea of the value of money," and to those who do not know them well, they can be "tricky and treacherous" (*The Hobbit* 192). This reveals a chink in the heroic Dwarven armor that the Ring can manipulate; thus, they cannot carry the Ring.

The Dwarves of Middle Earth were forged from stone by Aulë, the Vala of Craftsmanship and Substance of Arda, and Tolkien says they are made to be "strong and unyielding" master craftsmen of Middle-Earth, who would love the objects of their own creation above all things (*The Silmarillion* 43-45). These Dwarves are the craftsmen of Middle-Earth; however, this love for the craft is both a talent and a fault, as "there is a danger in allowing the desire to create to become an obsession" among Dwarves (Funk 332).

Kinship is incredibly important to Dwarves, and they are loyal to their clan, this strikes fear into the hearts of their foes, as "there is no knowing what a Dwarf will not dare and do for revenge or the recovery of his own" (*The Hobbit* 180). Despite having this fearsome loyalty, greed is problematic for Dwarves, and it is much easier for them to be overcome with the Dragon Sickness (i.e. greed) as they are of the earth and love its bounty like no other. They are strong-willed beings who value their kin only slightly above jewels and gold; thus, kinship is paramount to Dwarves as a race, and greed or Dragon Sickness is a condition of Dwarves. While the One

Ring would not use power to sway Dwarves, as it would for Men and Elves, it would amplify the preexisting traits of avarice and secretiveness.

Whereas Dwarves never come in contact with the One Ring, they do find the Arkenstone, a Dwarven treasure beyond all known value. So, for the purposes of outlining why a Dwarf cannot be a Ringbearer, the Arkenstone is, for Dwarves, a stand-in for the Ring, and in them the same weaknesses of avarice and distrust are amplified by the mere presence and thought of the stone- as is exemplified in Thorin's trial with the Arkenstone.

#### **4.1 Thorin**

In the first chapter of *The Hobbit* Thorin is ashamed upon discovering that his father and grandfather had snuck out of Erebor during Smaug's assault on the Dwarven Kingdom leaving the Dwarven people to die in the tunnels. The kings under the mountain left their people to die because revealing the secret passage would have alerted Smaug to its existence, foiling future plans to reclaim Erebor's riches. This enlightens Thorin to the limitless and boundless control that greed has over its subjects, even the Great Dwarf Kings of old (*The Hobbit* 23). This pride in tandem with greed, is a disastrous combination when dealing with the Ring of Power, which uses these selfish desires to tempt the wearer into hostility and deceit even towards close friends, as Boromir is overcome with a "raging fire" and attacks Frodo for the Ring ("The Fellowship" 399). Thorin's bout of rage calling Bilbo a "descendant of rats" and threatening to "throw [him] to the rocks!" after Bilbo has cunningly given the Arkenstone to Bard is an example of the stone's power of desire over Thorin (*The Hobbit* 247). It is Thorin's position as king, as well as his familial history of dragon sickness, that positions him as an embodiment of his people's susceptibility to avarice.

It should be noted that later in the novel, on his deathbed, Thorin retracts his angry words towards Bilbo, saying:

“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. But sad or merry, I must leave it now. Farewell! (*The Hobbit* 258-259)

Thorin has just highlighted the qualities of a Hobbit: food and cheer and song, the comforts of Hobbit life, kindness, and courage. With these values the world would be better, with less avarice and more selflessness. And “the words of a dying king should be taken seriously” (Snyder 6).

#### **4.2 Gimli**

The only Dwarf in the fellowship is Gimli, the son of Glóin. He is at the Council of Elrond because the Ringwraiths are offering a great reward for the return of the gold ring stolen by a Halfling, and on behalf of the king under the mountain- Dáin II Ironfoot, Glóin is warning Bilbo that the great darkness is seeking him out (“The Fellowship” 241). Dáin’s distrustful response to the Nazgûl is what Tom Shippey describes as a quality “we in the modern world have been taught not to value: lack of openness, deep insecurity, [and] an attitude which finds non-co-operation easy and natural” (280). This lack of openness and distrust towards non-dwarves is instinctive, suggesting that animosity and stubbornness is part of being a Dwarf. This innate distrust of non-dwarves would make for a selfish Ringbearer who would only use the Ring to benefit Dwarves.

For the Dwarves the promise of rings, like the ones the “Dwarf-sires possessed,” is trivial and a symbol of the growing darkness across Middle Earth (“The Fellowship” 241). This is in

stark contrast to Thorin, for whom the mere thought of the Arkenstone is overpowering. Gimli is often overlooked by members of the fellowship because of the traits of his race, as Dwarves are infamous for their “desires to manipulate the fabric of the earth [which] degenerate[s] into excessive pride,” which often works hand-in-hand with their greed as with the “search of Mithril” (Funk 332). As a Ringbearer, it can be argued that Gimli would not have been successful due to both his dwarvish predisposition to greed and his animosity with the Elves.

Dwarves and Elves have a natural animosity and disdain for one another, beginning with Dwarven creation by Aulë. Tolkien differentiates Dwarves from Elves in *The Silmarillion* saying “thy children [the Dwarves] will have little love for the things of [Yavanna’s] love... the things that grow and live upon the earth they will not heed,” and the Elves are connected with nature, often refusing to delve into the earth and preferring the forests of Mirkwood or Lorien (*The Silmarillion* 45). This natural disdain has been magnified with time, and when the fellowship enters Lórien, Gimli is met with accusations of being a “spy” and “dishonest” (“The Fellowship” 347). Gimli’s immediate reaction is to stand his ground and suggest that he has every right to walk freely. Funk describes this reaction in relation to the Dwarvish values saying: “[t]heir capacity for vengeance and their martial powers [are] triggered,” as “[t]hey [are] not empire-builders nor [do] they seek to impose their will on others. They [are] most content when left in peace.” (333). This emphasizes the Elven mischaracterization of Dwarves as a violent oppressors, suggesting that both Elves and Dwarves are too proud and selfish to acknowledge the merits of the other race. The distrust and animosity between both races are mutual, as Gimli is “content” with suffering if Legolas suffers the same (“The Fellowship” 348). The animosity between Gimli and Legolas later dissipates and becomes a friendly rivalry, and it can be argued

that this competitiveness is the Dwarvish stubbornness and pride at wanting to be equal to the Elves.

Avarice is a known trait among Dwarves, Gimli perhaps less so than Thorin. Gimli does not desire the Ring in any known way (neither to the reader, nor to Tolkien that he has written), and the only material possession that Gimli desires is Galadriel's hair. Gimli does not desire the Ring; however, he carries a love of creating and "there is a danger in allowing the desire to create to become an obsession [as] Dwarves had a tendency towards possessiveness as well; a further perversion of the joy" of creating (Funk 332). As a Ringbearer, Gimli would be unsuccessful, if not dangerous, due to his underlying greed (as a Dwarf) and innate distrust of Elves throughout the saga; which would, if he was in possession of the Ring, potentially lead him down a path of great conflict with the Elves.

Although Thorin's death precedes the quest to destroy the One Ring, he is a model for the Dwarvish qualities that would prevent the completion of the quest. So, a hero Gimli or Thorin may be, but neither could possibly be *the hero*, as their Dwarf nature is far too susceptible to materialistic greed and pride to ever handle the quest of destroying the One Ring.

## 5. MEN

This leaves only Men to vie for the role of hero in the world of Middle-Earth; however, Men are too weak of will to fight the Ring for control and win. In the eyes of Sauron, mortal men appear to be at the bottom of the skilled-and-formidable barrel. Sauron wants Elves to form his army, but they reject him; Dwarves are second to Elves in power, but they too turn Sauron away. Sauron finally has an army; it is of Men who are quick to choose evil because of their greedy nature.

Throughout Middle Earth's history there is only one race that becomes enslaved by the One Ring: Men. These Men become known as Nazgûl, or Ringwraiths in common speech. These Ringwraiths are the obvious justification for *why not Men?* as they are the original "Nine... Mortal Men Doomed to Die" predicted in the Ring's engraving ("The Fellowship" 50). Tolkien tells of the Ringwraiths' fates saying they are doomed to be "shadows under [Sauron's] great Shadow, his most terrible servants" ("The Fellowship" 51). As fallen Men, these Ringwraiths are the best example of the fate that befalls greedy, power hungry, and selfish Men.

One of the defining gifts of Men is their free-will, despite their tendencies to "stray often" and "not use their gifts for harmony" (*The Silmarillion* 42). This freedom, that is often misused for selfish reasons, cannot exist enslaved to Sauron, for the Nazgûl "[have] no will but [Sauron's] own, being each utterly subservient to the [R]ing that [has] enslaved him (*Unfinished Tales* 338). The true danger of the One Ring for Men is the removal of the human will, or soul. Free-will is what gives Men the choice to do good, and receive mercy, or do evil deeds, and receive no reprieve from the burdens of the world. This struggle with free-will is exemplified in Boromir in "The Fellowship of the Ring."

## 5.1 Boromir

Of the mortal men in the fellowship, only Boromir is twisted by the presence of the Ring. He is the steward of Gondor and sees himself as a “true-hearted” man, who is incorruptible (“The Fellowship” 398). He describes using the One Ring to give “the fearless [and] the ruthless” the power to cast out the evils of Mordor, yet, in the same breath, he declares that “all men would flock to his banner” as he envisions himself as a warrior king who uses the power of the Ring to conquer all the world (“The Fellowship” 398). The desire for power is ever present in the minds of Men, and it even encourages the growth of darkness within the hearts of good men. Boromir, a great and noble steward of Gondor tries to take the Ring from Frodo; thus, stooping to the level of thief and bully as he is changed into a monster driven by greed and power as “his fair and pleasant face [is] hideously changed; a raging fire was in his eyes” (“The Fellowship” 399). Unlike Dwarves or Elves, mortal men are doomed to die, and this is true of Boromir as well. He dies defending Merry and Pippin from Orcs and his last moments are of repentance and understanding. He finally understands the pull of the One Ring and says, “[a] madness took me, but it has passed” (“The Fellowship” 400). According to Kayla Beebout, “In this confession, Boromir accomplishes a mighty feat: to have been ensnared so deeply by the Ring and then to overcome its power is unheard of through the whole of the Ring’s long history” (5). It can be argued that the very price that Boromir would have paid is his soul, much like the Ringwraiths are “ensnared” in Sauron’s shadow because of their greed and madness for power (“The Fellowship” 51). Boromir spends the last moments of his life trying to make up for the betrayal of Frodo by saving the other Hobbits; his repentance and denying Sauron in his last moments is what saves his soul. It is here, that the danger of bringing the Ring around Men becomes apparent. The mere proximity to the One Ring brings out the most selfish and power mad desires

in men; they have no defense against it because they are the weakest of the creations on Middle Earth.

## 5.2 Aragorn

Aragorn long-ago had the blood of Elven Lords in his line, bringing a resistance to the call of the Ring that is above most Men. The true King of Gondor, Aragorn II, is a Númenorean (a Quenya term) or Dúnedain chieftain who joins the fellowship, and later leads the free-men to battle against Sauron's forces. As a Dúnedain, Aragorn is blessed with "long life and great power and wisdom." This distinction between Aragorn's people and the "lesser men" ("The Languages and Peoples of the Third Age"<sup>1129</sup>) emphasizes the more elven qualities, particularly wisdom, that permeate the Dúnedain lines. As a Dúnedain, Aragorn is superior to other Men in strength of heart and will; however, he too cannot be a Ringbearer because he is still a man. The strength of Men is portrayed by the Ringwraiths, who are slaves to Sauron's will. These Ringwraiths are not only ordinary Men, but "it is said that among those whom [Sauron] ensnared with the Nine Rings three were great lords of Númenórean race" (*The Silmarillion* 267). The Númenors are not impervious to the Ring's call, thus, Aragorn cannot carry the Ring to the Crack of Doom.

However, as a wise man, Aragorn understands the calling of the Ring and its falsehoods, as he has no interest in the Ring:

'[Y]ou are a stout fellow,' answered Strider; 'but I am afraid my only answer to you, Sam Gamgee, is this. If I had killed the real Strider, I could kill you. And I should have killed you already without so much talk. If I was after the Ring, I could have it – NOW!' He stood up, and seemed suddenly to grow taller. In his eyes gleamed a light, keen and commanding. Throwing back his cloak, he laid his hand on the hilt of a sword that had hung concealed by his side. They did not dare



to move. Sam sat wide-mouthed staring at him dumbly. ‘But I am the real Strider, fortunately,’ he said, looking down at them with his face softened by a sudden smile. ‘I am Aragorn son of Arathorn; and if by life or death I can save you, I will.’ (“The Fellowship” 171)

He has every power and chance to take the Ring from Frodo; however, neither Ringbearer nor madness is his quest. According to Verlyn Flieger, “Aragorn’s is a true quest to win a kingdom and a princess... [to which] Tolkien gives Aragorn the fairy-tale happy ending, the princess and the kingdom” (“Frodo and Aragorn” 143). Aragorn is wise and powerful, often showing his worthiness as a hero to bear a difficult quest; however, his quest is about leaving the Ranger (one of the many names for the Dúnedain) behind and embracing the part of him worthy of kingship. In his letters Tolkien calls Aragorn’s and Arwen’s love story an “essential story” (*The Letters* 237), or even Aragon’s main story, as his journey begins with a quest to gain Arwen’s hand and ends by becoming King of both Gondor and Arnor (“Annals of the Kings and Rulers: The Númenorean Kings” 1062). The primary reason that Aragorn is not a Ringbearer, however capable, is he is not fated to be one.

## 6. HOBBITS

Tolkien primarily describes his Hobbits as creatures of comfort: (1) as an understanding of their lifestyle in their hobbit holes, because a hobbit hole “means comfort” (*The Hobbit* 3); (2) in specific Hobbits that exude comfort, like Bilbo the “second edition of his solid and comfortable father” (*The Hobbit* 4); (3) and in the community built around sharing comforting Hobbit joys, like when Pippin says, “I keep a treasure or two near my skin, as precious as Rings to me. Here’s one: my old wooden pipe” (“The Fellowship” 562-563). As David Day writes “[Hobbits are] almost totally lacking in any ambition or desire for power” (126). This suggests that between a “lack of desire for power” and “expectedness”, the best understanding of a Hobbit is contentedness: the comfort and joy of one’s current life and life path, particularly of the life allotted to one.

Comfort and contentedness go hand in hand in Tolkien’s works, specifically, the Hobbit comforts of life generally coming from their “quiet plain” lives and lack of “magic” (*The Hobbit* 6,4). This plainness brings the Hobbits great joy because it draws no unnecessary attention from “Big Folk”, as they call [Men],” to their lives (“The Fellowship” 1). According to Christopher Snyder in *Hobbit Virtues: Rediscovering J.R.R. Tolkien’s Ethics from The Lord of the Rings*, “this contentedness is not enough, and the isolation of the Hobbits is not sufficient to provide them with security” (2). Thus, the Hobbit hero must emerge to defend the aspects of comfort in “Hobbiton—a place that values good food, stories told by fireside, and fellowship” (Snyder 18). The classic heroes of the world are “busy fighting one another in distant lands”, hoping to be remembered in heroic epics (*The Hobbit* 21), but those heroes are fighting and killing for glory or a perceived gain, which is a stark contrast to Tolkien’s principled (merciful) Hobbit hero that

goes on adventures, while selflessly upholding the value of “extravagant generosity” of mercy (*The Letters* 253).

The sense of Hobbit community or belonging is a factor of comfort, in that being a part of the community brings comfort. Tolkien says of Hobbits, “[t]hey [are] hospitable and delighted in parties, and in presents, which they [give] away freely and eagerly [accept]” and they are “generous and not greedy, but contented and moderate” (“The Fellowship” 2). Community building is part of being a Hobbit, and this community is centered around “[h]earth and home, creature comforts, food and family – these are very important things to Hobbits” (Snyder 2). According to Snyder, “love and [enjoying] fellowship” are “Hobbit virtues” (Snyder 9). One can argue then, that comfort and community are largely what makes the Hobbits impervious to the One Ring’s manipulation. This satisfaction in a Hobbit’s life, and the comfort that this contentedness brings, is described as a Hobbit strength against the corruption of darkness by Wayne Hammond, saying:

[T]he image of Home will be carried in our hearts and minds and will find expression, and in that expression will survive all that we hold of greatest value, that is most worth denying to the darkness. (32)

The thoughts of home, and all the comforts that a home brings, therefore are the motivations of the Hobbit to deny darkness, particularly in the Ring. It will be argued then, that part of the Hobbits’ resistance to the One Ring’s manipulation is their contentedness or comfort in the Hobbit way of life.

Tolkien’s fellowship is comprised of four Hobbits: Frodo Baggins the Ringbearer, Merriadoc Brandybuck, Peregrin Took, and Samwise Gamgee (Sam is a Ringbearer for a short

time in *The Two Towers*); however, there are two additional Hobbits of importance (both for being Ringbearers): Bilbo Baggins and Smeagol.

## 6.1 Bilbo

Bilbo is the first successful Ringbearer most notably because he is able to give the Ring to Frodo, the first time in history that the Ring is “abandoned” by its wearer (“*The Fellowship*” 55). Bilbo Baggins is a middle-aged Hobbit of 51 years, who lives in the neighborhood of The Hill- just as his family has done for generations (*The Hobbit* 3). The name Baggins is a descriptor of hobbitness, as Tolkien says this family has remained unchanged and has “never had any adventures or [done] anything unexpected” (*The Hobbit* 3). It is implied that this expectedness is a typical Hobbit trait, which is why the extraordinarily average and unchanging (often for generations) Hobbits are wealthy and respectable- perhaps the only time ordinariness is rewarded more than the extraordinary! Tolkien explains that the Tooks (Bilbo’s Maternal line) are less respectable than the Baggins’s even if the Tooks are richer, because they aren’t entirely “hobbitlike” (*The Hobbit* 4). Tolkien says that Belladonna Took, Bilbo’s mother, never “had any adventures after [becoming] Mrs Bungo Baggins” (*The Hobbit* 4). The very taking of the name Baggins seems to bring a level of ordinariness and expectedness to a Hobbit’s life. The Baggins level of expectedness can be implied as an ideal Hobbit trait (why else would the Baggins’s be revered among the Hobbits, if not for these reasons?).

This expectedness is defined by Tolkien as such: “you could tell what a Baggins would say on any question without the bother of asking him” (*The Hobbit* 3). The Baggins’s are comfortable and content with their lives, including Bilbo, who exemplifies the Hobbit comforts as a form of strength. According to Hammond, “by the end of *The Hobbit* Bilbo has lost none of the ‘homebodiness’ that is characteristic of his race: as we take leave of him in this book, he is

handing Gandalf a tobacco jar, with plate and mug one of the chief symbols of comfort in Tolkien's world" (30). Throughout Bilbo's adventure as a burglar, the memories of home are his strength, but also are "characteristic of his race" (Hammond 30) suggesting strength is a trait of Hobbits. This is not a traditional sense of strength, like with Beowulf or Odysseus, but a strength to be steadfast and joyous through difficult experiences.

Tolkien often describes Bilbo throughout *The Hobbit* in relation to "Tookishness," a specific quality relating to the Fallohide Hobbits. The Hobbit types are Fallohides, Hartfoots, and Stoors, of whom the Fallohides are fonder of Elves and the elven talents ("The Fellowship" 3). In Tolkien's words, the Fallohides are "bolder and more adventurous," "often found as leaders or chieftains among clans of Hartfoots and Stoors... [as] the strong Fallohidish strain could still be noted among the greater families, such as the Tooks" ("The Fellowship" 3-4). In many places where Tolkien says Tookish, one could also insert Fallohidish and the result is the same: thus, Tookish has become synonymous with the adventurous and brave.

The adventurous nature of the Tooks is well noted in Hobbit genealogical lore, and often among the Hobbits, Tooks are not respected (*The Hobbit* 4). For this reason, Bilbo represses his Tookish pride so he can maintain respect in the Hobbit community. The Hobbits are proud of their familial history (unlike perhaps the Elves whose pride stems from vanity), but the desire to be accepted in the Hobbit community has led to the Tookish individuals to denounce adventure. This sense of belonging within the Hobbit community is so instilled in the Hobbit spirit, that it is easier for Bilbo, and later Frodo, to hold this adventurous side back than it is to leave their communities (as Smeagol did).

The distinctions between Baggins and Took traits are present in Bilbo's adventures themselves, beginning with "An Unexpected Party" in *The Hobbit*. Bilbo, in true Baggins

fashion, thinks a “horrible thought”, “that the cakes might run short, and then he – as the host: he [knows] his duty and stuck to it however painful – he might have to go without” (9). This encapsulates the Baggins side of Bilbo, particularly the Hobbit values of comfort and community ties, as he is most concerned that there will not be enough cake for the guests (a good host should never run out, even if the guests are uninvited strangers) and himself- nevermind the fact that there are strange Dwarves in his home proposing adventure. The desire to have a comforting, “perfectly ordinary”, contented existence is shattered by the Dwarven songs of a time long ago, full of adventure (*The Hobbit* 12). Tolkien says Bilbo “[forgets] everything else, and [is] swept away into the dark lands under strange moons, far over The Water and very far from his hobbit-hole under The Hill” and “[t]hen something Tookish [wakes] up inside him” (*The Hobbit* 14-15). It is this “Tookish” side that wants to “wear a sword instead of a walking stick”; however, the “thought of plundering dragons settling on his quiet Hill and kindling it all to flames” brings him back to himself, the “plain Mr Baggins of Bag-End” (*The Hobbit* 16).

These two aspects are often, emotionally conflicting - the Took side is courageous, and decidedly uncaring for comfort, and the Baggins side is timid and content, preferring good company and a full belly every night; however, these traits are both necessary for our Hobbit hero, whose Tookish side brings him on the adventure and Baggins side keeps him well-rounded with clear values such as mercy and friendship.

In *The Hobbit* entitled “Riddles in the Dark” the necessity of both traits is clear. The ideal hero according to Tolkien is full of grace, humility, pity or mercy, and love (*The Letters* 233-234). The valiant Took side and community driven Baggins side work together to mold Bilbo into this true Tolkien hero. Tolkien says the first thing Bilbo does after waking up in the goblin lair is to “[feel] for his pipe... [t]hen... for tobacco” because the reminder of home “comfort[s]”

him just as much as Sting- the “blade made in Gondolin for the goblin-wars” (*The Hobbit* 64-65). This shows both sides of Bilbo, the Baggins finding security in tokens from home, and the Took side needing a sword to feel safe.

Tolkien gives the resilient and courageous Took nature from Bilbo’s perspective, saying:

‘Go back?’ he thought. ‘No good at all! Go sideways? Impossible! Go forward? Only thing to do! On we go!’ So up he got, and trotted along with his little sword held in front of him and one hand feeling the wall, and his heart all of a patter and a pitter. (*The Hobbit* 65)

This moment in the dark heart of the mountain is quite terrifying, even for a Tookish Hobbit. Tolkien says of Bilbo, that the thought of “frying bacon and eggs in his own kitchen at home” keeps his spirits high in the mountain, and especially in the battle of wits with Gollum (*The Hobbit* 64). According to Wayne Hammond, comfort is a “treasure [Bilbo] already [has] but [does] not fully appreciate: his own home, not merely for its material benefits (which he has shown he can do without, if he must), but because it is home and all the good things that that concept embodies (or seems to): order, stability, security” (30).

In “Riddles in the Dark<sup>2</sup>” Bilbo finds the One Ring inside the Misty Mountains. After the riddle battle between Gollum and Bilbo, Bilbo puts the Ring on and follows Gollum out of the tunnels. However, when Gollum realizes that Bilbo is there, Bilbo flees:

[Bilbo] 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,

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<sup>2</sup> The 1937 version of Chapter 5 in *The Hobbit* underwent major revisions. The most notable change from the original version being Gollum’s personality- he was a witty and polite creature, willing to help Bilbo when his adversary won the Riddle Game, and was changed to a desperate and deceptive creature whose willingness to cheat is distinctly un-Hobbitlike

kill it... [But Gollum] 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... He trembled. And then quite suddenly in another flash, as if lifted by a new strength and resolve, he leaped. (*The Hobbit* 80)

This is the first decision Bilbo makes after finding the Ring, thus beginning his bearing of the Ring with mercy. Bilbo is destined to find the Ring, but he chooses mercy with Gollum, a mercy that allows Bilbo to remain Bilbo and to not be consumed by the Ring's manipulations. The Took side of Bilbo is afraid, and in that fear wants to kill Gollum; however, it is the Baggins side that understands how isolation from other beings and endless days with nothing to remind one of home can be detrimental to the psyche of Gollum, a hobbitlike creature.

Bilbo does not surrender the Ring in this chapter, or this book for that matter, but the emphasis of choice in *The Hobbit* and "The Fellowship" is indicative of the Hobbit strength to "resist the One Ring, but not master it" (Snyder 5). Fate and free-will work together in this chapter but according to Verlyn Flieger, "Bilbo [is] 'fated' to find the Ring but not necessarily fated to surrender it ("The Music and the Task" 28). The choice to give up the Ring and the choice to be merciful is what allows Bilbo to remain sane and himself for 60 years, while bearing the Ring. In *The Fellowship*, after Bilbo gives the Ring to Frodo, Tolkien says that "[Bilbo] [takes] so little hurt from the evil, and escape[s] in the end, because he [begins] his ownership of the Ring... with pity" ("The Fellowship" 59). One can argue that Bilbo's success as a Ringbearer is because of this pity and mercy for Gollum, and it is mercy that Bilbo gives freely because he is a Hobbit: a creature that can empathize with missing home, and the riddles that Hobbit people sit by a fire to tell, and the closeness of a community that feels like one large family.



## 6.2 Sméagol

The burden of carrying the One Ring is not isolated to the Baggins name, as another Hobbit carries the Ring before Bilbo Baggins. Sméagol is the first Ringbearer, and it is notable that even roughly 520 years before Frodo's quest, all Ringbearers have been Hobbits. Sméagol is a successful Ringbearer because he is unable to be manipulated by the One Ring; however, his potential to be a hero does not inherently make him good. The quest of Ringbearing requires the bearer to refuse the Ring's temptations, and instead, keep the Ring safely out of Sauron's grasp. However unintentional, Gollum does this effectively, delaying Sauron's return for centuries. It is for this reason, that Gollum is included as a Ringbearer in the quest to destroy the One Ring.

Tolkien gives a brief history of Hobbits, despite the Hobbit tendency to remain out of sight, an "elusiveness... due solely to a professional skill" cultivated through "heredity and practice", which keeps them out of common history ("The Fellowship" 1). He introduces a hobbit-like breed called Stoors who lived as far back as the Eldar days (the era of the Eldar-Elves). Tolkien describes these Stoors, as "a clever-handed and quiet-footed little people... inquisitive and curious-minded" who live along the Anduin river ("The Fellowship" 52-53). For the purposes of this argument, Sméagol, a Stoor, is defined as a proto-hobbit, a creature that Tolkien calls "hobbit-kind", but distinguishable from the Hobbits of the Shire who are many generations younger; thus the proto-hobbits are genetically different from the modern Hobbits ("The Fellowship" 52). Even though the three Hobbit breeds (Stoors are among these breeds) are different in behavior and appearance, the common trait of Hobbits is a love for the Hobbit community and friendship bonds. The capacity for fellowship is high among Hobbits, since "Hobbits... have the capacity not just to experience fellowship with other Hobbits, but to form deep friendships with Men and Dwarves and Elves" because "Hobbits can overcome the natural

suspicion of those who look different, whose culture and ways are different” unlike the other races of Middle Earth (Snyder 49). Fellowship can thus come from shared interests, as Bilbo and Sméagol (and later Frodo and Sméagol) bond over the shared comforts of home. The desire to understand where things come from, the “roots and beginnings”, and where things go is a defining part of Hobbit community, or shared interests (“The Fellowship” 52).

Sméagol’s kin- Déagol, finds the Ring in the Anduin river, and is murdered by Sméagol in a fit of jealous desire for the Ring (“The Fellowship” 53). Tolkien says that Sméagol uses this Ring to “find out secrets, and he put[s] his knowledge to crooked and malicious uses”, but he is soon shunned by his family and renamed Gollum (“The Fellowship” 53). He leaves his home and follows the Anduin, going into the Misty mountains with the Ring desiring to see the roots and reveal the “secrets buried there which have not been discovered since the beginning” (“The Fellowship” 54). From the moment of taking the Ring to the moment it is stolen by Bilbo, Sméagol has resisted Sauron’s call to bring the Ring home.

Tolkien specifically notes in the prologue of “The Fellowship of the Ring” that the Hobbit dating system is far different from that of Elves and Men, so according to Hobbit calendars and the known dates of The Fellowship, Sméagol has the Ring for 478 years (4). The well-nigh 500 years with the Ring has reduced Gollum to a “miser with his gold”, as a life “[a]lone in the darkness with his "Precious," ... [is] as close to contentment as [his] tortured soul” ever comes (Day 126). In “The Fellowship” Tolkien writes of Gollum:

Even Gollum was not wholly ruined. He had proved tougher than even one of the Wise would have guessed – as a hobbit might. There was a little corner of his mind that was still his own, and light came through it, as through a chink in the dark: light out of the past. It was actually pleasant, I think, to hear a kindly voice

again, bringing up memories of wind, and trees, and sun on the grass, and such forgotten things. (55)

Tolkien makes note that Sméagol is better for having interacted with Bilbo, and one can argue it is because it reminded Sméagol of what once was: the community and family he left, the joy in challenging riddles and games, and the simple- comforting, days of his youth. Tolkien writes that Sméagol could only think of Riddles, because that is “the only game he [has] ever played... long ago, before he lost all his friends and was driven away, alone” (*The Hobbit* 68). Sméagol has spent the last 478 years stretching and “[continuing], until at last every minute is weariness” under the might of the Ring, a feat none has ever achieved in the history of Middle Earth (*The Fellowship* 47). This strength of will to resist the Ring’s desire to return to Mordor for nearly 500 years is amazing and Callaway notes that the burden of the Ring comes with a steep cost, saying, “[i]t has left [Gollum’s] mind splintered and [h]e becomes a personality consisting of two distinct parts, one which is the Ring, and another which is what remains of pre-Ring Sméagol” (17).

Gollum has committed murder in his youth and plots to do so again on the journey to Mordor. It is easy to argue that Gollum is not a traditionally heroic or good creature, he is in fact very dark and corrupted; however, he still is a hero (an anti-hero perhaps) in the grand scheme of preventing the return of Sauron. Gandalf, and Tolkien, put the power of the Ring well saying, “sooner or later – later, if he is strong or well-meaning to begin with, but neither strength nor good purpose will last- sooner or later the Dark Power will devour him” (*The Fellowship* 47). The very act of resisting the Ring is what makes Sméagol/Gollum a hero in *The Lord of the Rings*, it is the resistance that becomes a greater burden with time fragmenting the mind between Sméagol - the cunning and mischievous Hobbit, and no less of a Hobbit for that matter, and

Gollum- the part of his mind that is consumed by the Ring, yet, never bends to the Will of Sauron.

### **6.3 Frodo Baggins**

Of the Ringbearers, Frodo is successful in the quest for the Ring, primarily because the Ring is never able to manipulate his actions- even if he is corrupted past the point of no return. Frodo Baggins is raised reading the stories from the Red Book detailing Bilbo's adventures across Middle-Earth. He also is raised in the Shire and has the same values as Bilbo, a love of great food and great friends. The reader is introduced to Frodo when the young Hobbit is learning about the One Ring. Frodo has just inherited this Ring from Bilbo, and he has no idea the grave destiny he faces.

In the beginning of "The Fellowship", Frodo is having a difficult time accepting his destiny, saying, "I do really wish to destroy it! ... Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?" (61). The acceptance of fate is a common theme in *The Lord of the Rings* saga, with characters often trying to defy or change their fates. Flieger writes that free-will and fate are intertwined in the Hobbit's life, but it is the concept of a "predestined" situation or outcome that troubles both the characters and readers ("The Music and the Task" 14). Frodo is destined to have the Ring, just as Bilbo was destined before him. The choice to take the Ring is an illusion, as it was predetermined by Ilúvatar; however, the choice to fight the Ring's desires every step of the way is entirely Frodo's doing.

The fact that Frodo wants to destroy the Ring, not abuse its power, is understood by understanding the Hobbit value of contentment. This is an outcome Sauron cannot fathom, that mortal creatures would not want to take ultimate power ("The Two Towers" 496-497). One of the many factors in Frodo's success, is the nature of Hobbits to not seek power, especially to

“not attempt to name or really understand the Ring; the Ring is firmly separate from [them]” (Croft 90). Sauron cannot understand that Frodo wants to destroy the Ring, because Sauron has always sought power, and Ilúvatar has brought into the fray a creature so opposite in motive, the Hobbit, that Frodo’s actions are incomprehensible.

Tolkien gives the reader a glimpse into Frodo’s motivations before the Hobbit accepts the quest to take the Ring: “I feel that as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable, I shall find wandering more bearable: I shall know that somewhere there is a firm foothold, even if my feet cannot stand there again” (“The Fellowship” 62). Frodo’s motivation is the Hobbits of the Shire, and the lives they can live if he takes this burden; he seeks to protect the “comfortable” Shire. The “visions of home remind... Frodo [of what he] has vowed to save, and which against the darkness of Mordor seems most worth fighting for” (Hammond 32). An argument can be made that the “comfortable” Shire really means the security of a last good place, and that the memories of a home that needs to be preserved keep Frodo going. After all, Hobbits value comfort, things that remind them of good times and happy homes.

Leaving this comfort behind, the Hobbits go to Buckland to begin their journey to Rivendell, and along the way they are being chased by the Ringwraiths. Frodo is overcome with fear, and the Ring tempts him for the first time with the promise of safety; not greed or power, but safety (“The Fellowship” 74). The Ringbearer does not give in to the temptation, but the fact that the Ring uses safety to call to Frodo’s soul would lay ground for the argument that Frodo is content with his life and he values the security that a home provides.

The Hobbits encounter the Ringwraiths and Frodo feels the dark pull of the One Ring; however, this is not their last encounter with the Nazgûl. Farther along in the journey Frodo is stabbed by the Nazgûl, and he wakes up to Gandalf’s words:

It seems hobbits fade reluctantly. I have known strong warriors of the Big People who would have quickly been overcome by that splinter, which you bore for seventeen days... Fate [has] helped you, ... not to mention courage. For your heart was not touched, and only your shoulder was pierced; and that is because you resisted to the last. (“The Fellowship” 222)

Frodo is not weak of will, and Gandalf compares him to warrior Men. Gandalf’s comparison to a warrior is accurate in the traditional sense: that a traditional hero would be predestined to fight a particular battle, as Frodo is destined for this; however, for Tolkien the making of a hero is more than courage, it is also mercy. The value of community is not just in the hobbit-towns of the Shire, but also in Frodo’s treatment of Gollum. Sméagol is a shell of a Hobbit, who vaguely recalls the memories of family and happiness. The recollection of these memories is due to Frodo’s pity, a pity that stays his hand in killing Sméagol, and a pity that redeems Smeagol. In doing this, Frodo has ultimately garnered the mercy of Ilúvatar, giving both Gollum and Frodo a merciful completion. Callaway describes the humanity of Frodo by showing pity to Gollum, much like Bilbo did before him, as now “Gollum swears to Frodo to be good, [and] he is” (17). If Gollum were completely under the dominion of Sauron, he would not lead the hobbits faithfully through the Dead Marshes, and directly towards Mordor, a land he fears. And if Gollum were entirely corrupted, he would have killed Frodo and Sam and taken the Ring easily, for he was presented with many opportunities (Callaway 16)

Frodo’s strength comes from his willpower, a mental strength that remains unwavering until the very last moment on Orodruin (the Crack of Doom), and reflects a Christian theme of “salvation” that is centered around the “humility and mercy” of the sacrificial person (*The Letters* 252). By acknowledging his own weakness and inability to move forward, Frodo garners

the mercy of Ilúvatar and is saved. It is crucial to discuss Frodo's strength of will because it is this will-power that finally runs out at the Crack of Doom. In his letters #191 and #192, Tolkien discusses the possibility of Frodo failing because his strength to defy the Ring had ceased, and he argues that Frodo failing the quest does not make him a failure (*The Letters* 252-253). Frodo is, in Tolkien's words, deserving of "all honour" because he spends every ounce of his strength in fighting Sauron's will, and the culmination of his strength can bring him no farther than he is (*The Letters* 253). From the moment Frodo can go no farther, divine intervention comes into play. Letter #192 discusses mercy, and how it is Frodo's mercy towards Gollum, and later Saruman, that allows Gollum to complete the quest (*The Letters* 253). It is "Gollum's covetousness of his Precious" that completes the quest through divine intervention (Robertson 110). Elizabeth Arthur notes of the Hobbits that "had circumstances treated them less kindly, or their own characters been less strong" they would have ended as Sméagol did (20). When Frodo shows an abundance of mercy, it is Ilúvatar's gift of mercy that allows Frodo to be saved and the quest completed. The Christian motif of salvation through good works is present throughout Frodo's journey, and it is this honor and success of the cause that absolves Frodo of his failures.

Frodo is a hero, not by circumstances, but because he is a Hobbit- one of Ilúvatar's chosen Ringbearers. Flieger categorizes Frodo as a low mimetic hero: a hero who "has doubts, feels fear, falters, makes mistakes ... and [struggles with] coping with burdens that are too great" ("Frodo and Aragorn" 142). The inner peace Frodo feels in the Shire before the quest no longer exists, as the safe comforting qualities that define Hobbit community are twisted by his experiences on his journey. Frodo cannot find comfort and fellowship after bearing the Ring to Mordor, thus, he must give up "himself" (the man he was before the journey, and the man he could have been had he not gone) and his friends and recover his soul in the Undying Lands

(Wodzak 112). The “flaws” present in Frodo are by design, that the intentions of Ilúvatar (which I do not presume to understand) are for Frodo’s ultimate peace. “His pain, the loss of his finger, and the knowledge that he could not ultimately resist the Ring prevents Frodo from ever enjoying happiness and contentment in the Shire.” (Snyder 108). Frodo’s heroic character is complex and has motifs of a fairy-hero, tragic hero, and a traditional hero, thus, the best understanding of Frodo’s heroism is to call him what he is: a Hobbit hero.

#### **6.4 Samwise Gamgee**

Sam is the most successful Ringbearer not only for relinquishing the Ring to Frodo, but for truly abandoning it and returning to himself completely, completing both the physical and spiritual quest of relinquishing the Ring. Samwise Gamgee is a humble gardener for the Baggins family, who travels with Frodo to Mordor. As a Hobbit, Sam does not care much for the material comforts of life, especially if Frodo is burdened in any way; however, his greatest comfort is the assurance that he can always be with Frodo. The disregard of physical burdens plays into Sam’s loyalty to Frodo, especially when the physical burden of the Ring becomes too great. Tolkien compares Sam’s loyalty to Frodo, to that of a dog, saying “[Sam cried out] spring[ing] up like a dog invited for a walk” (“The Fellowship” 64). Sam’s constant desire to help Frodo and share in his burdens, suggests that Sam’s primary motivator for being on the quest is love and fellowship. According to Snyder, “Sam’s constant service to Frodo manifests itself in many ways: carrying more than his share of baggage, helping tend his wounds, preparing meals, rationing water and lembas on the journey to Mordor,” and even offering the small comforts of home that both characters miss, like songs and reminders of what awaits them at home (103). This service and desire to help Frodo is a sign of their fellowship, and the love Sam has for Frodo.



Frodo tries to dissuade Sam from going to Rivendell by saying it is dangerous and “neither of us will come back,” to which Sam replies: “[i]f you don’t come back, sir, then I shan’t, that’s certain” (“The Fellowship” 87). For many Hobbits the material comforts are a sense of security in dark times, or the thoughts of family, but for Sam, the only thought on his mind is how he can better care for his best friend. That is his comfort, and the friendship with Frodo is his motivating force.

This love for his friends, specifically Frodo, is what sets up Samwise’s heroic arc. From the breaking of the fellowship, when Sam and Frodo are left all alone, the courageous Sam shines through. Tolkien shows Sam’s unconditional loyalty through the dialogue between the two Hobbits, saying,

‘But I must go at once. It’s the only way.’ ‘Of course it is,’ answered Sam. ‘But not alone. I’m coming too, or neither of us [is]. I’ll knock holes in the boats first.’  
(“The Fellowship” 406)

Sam takes the brave first steps into the true unknown, where nobody can help him should he fail. According to Edith Crowe, Hobbits are not born heroes in the traditional sense, it is the “people like Gandalf and Aragorn [who] are expected to be heroes, they are born to it- it’s part of their job, so to speak” (7). The implication of this is that Hobbits grow into their heroism, each in different ways. This is not to say that the Hobbit hero is an unlikely hero who grows into heroism, rather, the Hobbits must grow and learn how to see their strengths as heroic virtues. For Sam, bravery comes naturally in the defense of Frodo- in the defense of his friend who is also a reminder of life in the Shire.

Samwise is a hero undoubtably, a true hero as Tolkien states in his letter #184 to Sam Gamgee, “the ‘Sam Gamgee’ of my story is a most heroic character, ... even though his origins

are rustic” (*The Letters* 244). Samwise does not see himself as a hero because Hobbits have never been heroes. It is the great warrior Elves who are heroic and have defined heroism to this point; however, Sam’s hobbitness is what makes him perfect for the role of Ringbearer and what creates the ideal hero, even if he does not see heroism in himself until much later. Crowe writes that “the hobbits represent the common man as hero,” suggesting that it is the everyday person who is the chief hero in grand schemes (Crowe 7). The Hobbit may seem to be a “common man” at first glance, but the Hobbit hero’s ordinariness is completely different from the ordinary (not Dúnedain) Men of Middle Earth. What makes Men poor Ringbearers is their susceptibility to human faults: greed, envy, pride, or power; however, the Hobbit struggles with different faults. One could argue that the “common man” hero in the Hobbit, is more along the lines of the ideal man as hero; a man who values his community and family over gold, and takes the time to treasure the simplicities of life.

As a Ringbearer, Sam completes his quest most effectively even when the Ring calls out to his greatest desires. Sam desires a hero’s life, one where he will be remembered and respected for years to come. Tolkien repeatedly points out “[Sam’s] love for Frodo rose above all other thoughts” (“The Return” 899) even when Sam takes that first step into Mordor and feels the crushing weight of the Ring, but there is “no comfort there” in the Ring- only in the “love of his master that [helps] most to hold him firm” (“The Return” 900-901). The Ring is no comfort for Samwise, it offers no security or pleasant thoughts, unlike Frodo who is Sam’s rock. At the peak of his temptation:

[Sam feels] that he [has] from now on only two choices: to forbear the Ring, though it would torment him; or to claim it, and challenge the power that [sits] in its dark hold beyond the valley of shadows. Already the Ring [tempts] him,

gnawing at his will and reason... he [sees] Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age... deep down in him [lives] still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense: he [knows] in the core of his heart that he [is] not large enough to bear such a burden. (“The Return” 901)

Samwise is tempted, and the temptation is great. According to Croft, choosing to forbear the Ring and simply exist with it as opposed to owning it, and never choosing to “name or really understand the [R]ing” is what keeps the Hobbits saner than the other beings (Sauron included) who carry the Ring (91). One can argue then, that the burden of the Ring for both Frodo and Sam is much the same, it will torment them until they choose to make it theirs.

Samwise is the most successful Ringbearer because he accepts the burden of the Ring freely and gives it up freely. The love for Frodo keeps Sam from claiming the Ring and the illusions of power it offers.

## CONCLUSION

The success of the Hobbit Ringbearer is not through circumstance or magic, for he is neither an unlikely hero nor a fairy-tale hero, but through the Hobbit values themselves. The Hobbit way of life is centered around making memories of good times with friends and family and finding peace in the simplest of lifestyles. The Hobbit Ringbearer is not just an individual who is capable of carrying the Ring, but the ability for the race as a whole to take up the mantle and carry the Ring should the need arise. There are four Hobbit Ringbearers and each is successful in his quest, a quest that differs for each Hobbit. Sméagol's quest was not of carrying the Ring to Mordor, as he would have undoubtedly failed and taken the Ring back into seclusion, it was to keep the Ring from Sauron for centuries. Bilbo's quest is to retrieve the Ring from Sméagol. Frodo is the bearer to Mordor, and Samwise the bearer of Frodo. When the task becomes too difficult, Sam is there to push Frodo back onto the path. It is fate or grand design that places the One Ring in the hands of the Hobbit, but the innate values of Hobbits is what makes them successful.

The unlikely hero archetype is surface level, thus calling the Hobbit hero an unlikely hero is a surface-level understanding of Tolkien's complex heroes. The four Ringbearers each have their own doubts, fears, and motivations; however, these faults and desires stand out against the other races of Middle Earth whose faults make them unable to carry the Ring successfully.

The Hobbit hero is the only possible Ringbearer, and as such, the only possible hero for the quest of destroying the One Ring. This does not, however, negate the deeds of the other heroes of Middle Earth. Each hero in *The Lord of the Rings* has his own quest to undertake. For Aragorn, the quest is for kingship; and for Boromir, it is acceptance of his fate and redeemed

honor. For Gimli and Legolas, the peace and renewed trust in an enemy is the quest, which results in a newfound friendship between the two races. Each of these heroes is necessary for the completion of the main quest- destroying the One Ring and Sauron with it; however, the Hobbits are designed specifically for this role. A role that is not taken by chance or circumstance, but by grand design.

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