

## The Hobbit: More Than Just a Fuzzy Children's Tale

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Many critics are worried about the prospect of Peter Jackson turning J.R.R. Tolkien's children's lit classic into another dark and violent exploration of Middle-earth. Are the critics' fears justified? To some extent. But in this talk, Greg Wright expands on the thesis of his commentary for *TheOneRing.net*: that, especially for cinematic fans of Middle-earth, *The Hobbit* is more about learning to live with the dark corners of Middle-earth than it is about waxing nostalgic for the goodness and light of The Shire. From that perspective, Peter Jackson is the right man for the job.

### I. Intro

- A. The scuttlebutt, as we all know, is that New Line Cinema has greenlit *The Hobbit*, but that both Peter Jackson and New Line head Robert Shaye declare that Jackson will not be at the helm of the project. At the heart of the issue, at least publicly, is the lawsuit Jackson and company have filed against New Line over profits from the ancillary rights to *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Jackson [has said](#) he "won't discuss making the [Hobbit] movies until the lawsuit is resolved," and Shaye has gone so far as [to declare](#) that he doesn't "want to make a movie with somebody who is suing me... It will never happen during my watch." Complicating perception of the truth is Saul Zaentz' [assertion](#) that *The Hobbit* "will definitely be shot by Peter Jackson."

### B. Fan Reaction

1. LET THE HOBBIT HAPPEN (calisuri at [thehobbitfilm.com](http://thehobbitfilm.com), arathorn at [theonering.net](http://theonering.net)): Please make 'The Hobbit' film a reality with Peter Jackson and his Academy Award(R) winning team at the helm. We hope that you can work through any rights and licensing issues, and have enough foresight to see that a film version of this J.R.R. Tolkien classic would be just as successful as the \$3 billion box-office take of 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy. As a Ringer fan, I can assure you I will go to see a live-action version of 'The Hobbit' at least twice, and most likely more. With Peter Jackson at the helm, I and millions of my fellow Tolkien fans will support your efforts.
2. [ONLINE PETITION](#), "The Hobbit Film - The way it was meant to be or not at all" (LithQ): Fans want a "Hobbit" movie. But not a cold-blooded, rushed "Hobbit" movie spawned by greed and an unwillingness to cooperate for the good of the fans. We need to STOP "The Hobbit" movie from being made under these circumstances... Films are for fans, and this decision is not fair to the loyal LOTR fans around the world. Our opinions as fans should count for something as we dictate which films become successful. Let us convince the studios

to AT LEAST sit down with Peter Jackson one last time to come to some sort of financial agreement and deliver a "Hobbit" movie the way it was meant to be made.

3. THEONER.NET: It might be that the number of fans who would actually boycott the Hobbit would be a small proportion of the total audience. Still, their influence on the merchandise and DVD sales and repeat-viewing ticket sales is disproportionately large. Any studio - and director - understands that it's these people who make films profitable. Not that we are endorsing a boycott. ... However, we know that there are many bitterly disappointed fans out there who \*are\* endorsing a boycott. That's your right - even if we might not agree with it. The fact is, there are many views among Tolkien fans about what ought to happen with The Hobbit, and what ought to be done to make it happen. There are those who are pro Peter Jackson. There are those who don't care and just want The Hobbit made soon. There are even those who want anyone BUT Peter Jackson to direct.
- C. Peter Jackson at *Ain't It Cool News*: It would seem strange to have somebody else do it, although some part of me would be interested in going to see somebody else's HOBBIT, be able to buy my popcorn and go and sit and watch the film. I'm not against that and if our schedule is impossible, then that's what they'll do. They'll certainly go and get someone else to make it. They won't wait, which is their right. ... If I was doing THE HOBBIT I'd try to get as many of the guys back as I could. I mean, there's actually a role for Legolas in THE HOBBIT, his father features in it, obviously Gandalf and Saruman should be part of it. There's things that you can do with THE HOBBIT to bring in some old friends, for sure. ... We think the two film idea is really smart. One of the problems with The Hobbit is that it is a fairly simple kids story, and doesn't really feel like The Lord of the Rings. Tonally I mean. It's always made me a little worried, but with two films that kinda gets easier. It allows for more complexity. At that implied stuff with Gandalf and the White Council and the return of Sauron could be fully explored.
- D. *Variety* (on two movies): As for "The Hobbit," [Harry] Sloan confirmed that MGM was in advanced talks with Peter Jackson to make two movies based on JRR Tolkien's "prequel" to "The Lord of the Rings." The first would be a direct adaptation of "The Hobbit," and the second would be drawn from "footnotes and source material connecting 'The Hobbit' with 'Lord of the Rings,'" he explained.
- E. Critical Reaction
1. Peter Chattaway: Why on earth would anybody want to turn The Hobbit into a mere prequel overloaded with nods to The Lord of the Rings? I mean, really. One of the whole points of The Lord of the Rings -- the films, I mean, not the books -- was that Frodo's adventure

was "quite different" from the sorts of adventures that Bilbo had had. Frodo's adventure was much darker, less innocent, than the adventures that Bilbo had. So why would a film all about Bilbo's adventures want to shoehorn all this darker stuff in there?

2. Jeffrey Overstreet: The Hobbit is a much smaller story, and needs to be treated that way. If it's going to work, it'll be made with a lighter touch, and the filmmakers will resist the temptation to make it as dark as The Lord of the Rings. The Lord of the Rings was a fantasy for grownups. The Hobbit is an amusing childrens' story. They'll need to stick to the text, without bloating small episodes into big action set pieces. The battle of five armies is a great battle, but it's not an eventful battle that requires a long, sprawling effects extravaganza.

## II. What Kind of Story Should The Hobbit Movie Be?

### A. Tolkien's Opinion

1. *The Hobbit* as Disconnected and "Independently Conceived": "I did not know as I began it that it belonged" (Letter 131). PLUS: Letter 163
2. *The Hobbit* as a Different (Children's) Beast: Letter 131
3. *The Hobbit* as Flawed Convention: Letter 215

### B. The Impact of Cinematic "Prequel" Status

1. Wright (TORn): we have, in short, already lost the innocence of Middle-earth. Trying to recapture it—on a scale that would duplicate the boxoffice success of Rings—would be a bit like returning to fifth-grade summer camp after a stint in college.
2. The Cart *As* Horse, and The New Shadow: Letters 256 & 338.
3. Reflection of the Spiritual Dimension (Wright, *TIP*): While the Hobbits are busy replanting and rebuilding the Shire, and "Aragorn far away on the throne of Gondor" reforges ancient alliances and labors "to preserve some memory" of ages past, the spiritual state of Middle-Earth in the Fourth Age remains bleak. "It is a monotheistic world of 'natural theology,'" Tolkien wrote (Letter 91), and not as an endorsement. "The Third Age was not a Christian world," he clarified (Letter 165); and the Fall of Barad-dûr did nothing to change that.

### C. Business Considerations

1. Investment

2. Return
3. The Two Options

#### D. How *The Hobbit* Functions as Literature

1. “There and Back Again” (Wright): Complicating matters is the general perception amongst many fans—a sentimental, romanticized, and unexamined perception—that *The Hobbit* is a light, whimsical fantasy. It is not. It is, in fact, an allegorical *bildungsroman*, a coming-of-age tale, a story of loss of innocence. It’s about children no longer covering their eyes in terror and imagining giants and bogies, but rather coming to see the world with eyes wide open and finding out that the most dangerous monsters may be some of their fellow adventurers. The conventions of fantasy may dispose of Smaug quite neatly; dealing with Thorin—or Bilbo’s own complicity in a Great Wrong—is another matter entirely, but one which is at the heart of *The Hobbit*.
2. But Changed, as perhaps best expressed in Frodo’s words: “Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same, for I shall not be the same.” Bilbo was indeed “enlarged in vision and wisdom,” as Tolkien remarked (Letter 131), but he was also forever disillusioned by the reality of “the inevitable boredom with goodness,” and broken by the power of the Ring. So as much as we might enjoy the fantasy of *The Hobbit* as an exercise in childlike goodness and light, the reality is quite different. Given that *The Lord of the Rings* has already come to the screen, though (and stupendously so), we have already seen the idyll of the Shire (in the extended FotR); Jackson has demonstrated how blithe young Hobbits such as Pippin must learn to become grave warriors; we have already witnessed the darkness of battles like that at the Pelennor; through Théoden, we have already witnessed sleepers waking to the harsh reality of betrayal and self-deception; we also have, in short, already lost the innocence of Middle-earth.

### III. Fantasies and Realities Within Fantasies

#### A. The Theory: Bilbo as Unreliable Narrator

1. Naiveté
2. Deceit: CT and JRRT in Letters (Notes on Letters 128 and 130)

#### B. Fantasies

1. The Geography

- a) Over Here and... Over There???
  - b) What About Bree, Weathertop, The Great East Road, and the Last Bridge?
2. The Trolls
- a) Tom, Bert, and William (Hobbit, p. 46)
  - b) Trolls of Moria, FOTR p. 338; “Two great trolls appeared; they bore great slabs of stone, and flung them down to serve as gangways over the fire.”
  - c) At the Black Gate, ROTK, 168
3. Giants
- a) Thunderstorm in the Misty Mountains: Hobbit, 66-68
  - b) Letter 35, 1939, about LOTR: “Though there is no dragon (so far), there is going to be a Giant.” Ents?
  - c) Nowhere else in the mythology
4. Spiders
- a) Mirkwood
  - b) Shelob
  - c) Ungoliant

#### C. Realities

- 1. Rivendell
- 2. The Eagles
- 3. Beorn
- 4. War and Death?

#### IV. Conclusions: What Kind of Movie?

- A. Not “There and Back Again,” but “There, and How Did I Get There?”
- B. A Mystery About Bilbo’s Fantasies and Illusions