



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on December 15, 2012

Review of *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*

The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey, released on December 13, proves to be an outstanding first film in this new *Lord of the Rings* prequel trilogy, the second installment of which is scheduled to hit theaters December 2013. It brings J.R.R. Tolkien's classic novel about Middle-Earth to life in a way that can be accomplished only through masterful use of plot elements, impressive technological advances, charismatic performances, and outstanding direction and cinematography.

As summarized by *Forbes*,

The movie itself is a flashback, from the point of view of a younger Bilbo (Martin Freeman). The strait-laced [sic] Hobbit is tapped by the wizard Gandalf (Sir Ian McKellan) for an adventure. Bilbo wants nothing to do with the offer, particularly when a party of dwarves, led by the late king's grandson Thorin Oakenshield, come calling at his door. But surprising everyone, including himself, he finds himself on, well, an unexpected journey.



At the opening of the movie, a group of dwarves come one by one to the dwelling of a younger Hobbit Bilbo Baggins to persuade him to embark on an epic adventure of helping them exact revenge on the dragon Smaug, who has stolen their home. Decades previously, the dragon had driven the dwarves from their home in Erebor, now called the Lonely Mountain, forcing them to scatter throughout Middle Earth.

What does this all have to do with Bilbo? It turns out that the dwarves have decided that someone should to sneak into Smaug's place of residence undetected — and the Hobbit appears to them to be perfect for that role.

But Bilbo is not exactly an adventure seeker. In fact, when urged to take part in this bold endeavor, he opines rather comically, "Nasty, disturbing, uncomfortable things make you late for dinner."

Though the little Hobbit is rather convincing in his resistance to the entire operation, just when the dwarves begin to believe that he is a lost cause, he amazingly changes his mind and decides to join them.

The journey Bilbo embarks on proves to be everything he had feared: harsh and uninviting lands, full of trolls and giants and all sorts of unwelcoming creatures. But the Hobbit surprises himself with some newfound courage.



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What unfolds is an epic tale of courage, loyalty, sacrifice, and redemption — of people struggling to reclaim their land and right a terrible wrong — which will no doubt provoke empathy from moviegoers on a variety of levels.

The story of *The Hobbit* seems to turn some classic fairy tale elements on their head, and the wizard Gandalf articulates this well when he tells the elf queen Galadriel that he does not believe it takes mighty power to hold evil in check. Rather, he says, “It is the small things, everyday deeds of ordinary folk, that keep the darkness at bay. Simple acts of kindness and love.” For Gandalf, that is what compelled him to choose Bilbo. The story places a significantly greater emphasis on passion, love, loyalty, and sacrifice over might and power. Thus, Bilbo is an ideal hero.

The film’s focus on good versus evil is a positive one, though some moviegoers may be disturbed by the use of magic in that ongoing battle. Tolkien’s book *The Hobbit* presented those supernatural occurrences as more heavenly, particularly since his Gandalf was a guardian angel; however, those elements are absent from this film. The magic seen here is closer to something one encounters in *Harry Potter* films.

But *The Hobbit* makes some important points about conquering evil. When Gandalf gives Bilbo a sword to arm himself, for instance, he warns him of the temptation to rely on it too often. “True courage,” he tells Bilbo, “is about knowing not when to take a life, but when to spare one.”

That is not to say that the film is without violence, for it has far more than was in the novel, because of director Peter Jackson’s decision to include battles that are not original to Tolkien.

Additionally, Jackson’s handling of *The Hobbit* is a dramatic change from the overall whimsical tone of the novel, which was considered one of Tolkien’s most child-friendly works. It seems as if the director did his best to stick closely to what he had created in the *Lord of the Rings* films.

Still, despite some of the changes made in the book’s recreation on film, most Tolkien fans are likely to be pleased with the end result, with the possible exception of purists who would not want any changes.

It is worth mentioning that the three-dimensional version of the film has been shot at a rate of 48 frames per second, since much has been written on that decision in the months leading up to *The Hobbit’s* on-screen debut. Peter Jackson posted about that decision on his Facebook page last year:

We are indeed shooting at the higher frame rate. The key thing to understand is that this process requires both shooting and projecting at 48 fps, rather than the usual 24 fps (films have been shot at 24 frames per second since the late 1920s). So the result looks like normal speed, but the image has hugely enhanced clarity and smoothness. Looking at 24 frames every second may seem ok — and we’ve all seen thousands of films like this over the last 90 years — but there is often quite a lot of blur in each frame, during fast movements, and if the camera is moving around quickly, the image can judder or “strobe.”

The effects are dramatic, and Jackson noted, “Film purists will criticize the lack of blur and strobing artifacts, but all of our crew — many of whom are film purists — are now converts.”

According to Jackson, moviegoers will adjust to the bizarre filming rather quickly, and this reviewer found that to be true. However, grumblings were heard from some in the audience that the 48 fps somehow undermined the story. But for those who allow themselves to become engulfed in the tale, the film choice may be easy to ignore.



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