



The Lord of the Rings: Book One

TEA WITH TOLKIEN BOOK CLUB NOTES

These book club notes are for personal use only for the purposes of participation in the Tea with Tolkien community. I do not claim any ownership to the maps or copywritten material linked within this document. These notes are meant to accompany a close reading of Tolkien's tales as told in The Lord of the Rings. The short character biographies found within the main characters section of this document are quoted from The Complete Guide to Middle-earth by Robert Foster. To learn more about Tea with Tolkien, please visit www.teawithtolkien.com.

The Lord of the Rings: Book I Summary

Book One of The Lord of the Rings begins sixty years after the end of The Hobbit, as Bilbo is preparing to celebrate his 111th birthday party. At this party of special magnificence, Bilbo gathers his friends and family and explains, "This is the end. I am going. I am leaving NOW. GOOD-BYE". At this, he disappears followed by a blinding flash. Afterward he is not seen in the Shire again, leaving all he owns behind to Frodo—including the Ring.

Time passes and after an unexplained disappearance, Gandalf returns to Bag End with urgent and dark news. He tells Frodo about the history of the Ring and the grave peril it brings to the Shire, and they decide they must take it to Rivendell.

Frodo sets off towards Crickhollow first, where he has purchased the home where he is pretending to retire. On the way they are pursued by a mysterious Black Rider, but narrowly avoid it several times. They are helped by Farmer Maggot who reunites them with Merry, and together they arrive safely at Crickhollow.

In the morning they set off through the Old Forest, hoping to cut through safely and quickly. However, they are driven away from their path and soon find themselves in the heart of the enchanted forest. Merry and Pippin are trapped by Old Man Willow and as Frodo calls desperately for help, they are rescued by Tom Bombadil. Tom leads them to his home where they rest and learn much about Middle-Earth and its inhabitants. After they bid farewell to Tom and Goldberry, they are soon captured by a Barrow-wight and are once again rescued by Tom Bombadil.

Afterwards they make for the Inn at the Prancing Pony, where they are met by Strider. He warns them of the pursuit of the Black Riders and after reading a letter from Gandalf, they accept Strider as their guide. They leave, heading for Weathertop, where they finally come face to face with the Black Riders. Frodo is wounded by a Morgul blade and his health begins to deteriorate rapidly. Strider tries to heal him with Athelas, but it is beyond his skill to heal. They wander through the wilderness towards Rivendell and are relieved when they are met by an elf named Glorfindel.

Glorfindel gives Frodo his horse and tells him to ride ahead, as they are being closely pursued by the Black Riders. They reach the Ford, where the Riders are suddenly overcome by a 'cavalry of waves'. As the waters rush around him, Frodo falls and sees no more.

Main Characters

- Bilbo Baggins -
 - "(TA 2890–) Hobbit of the Shire, adventurer, Elf-friend, Ring-bearer, author, and scholar. Bilbo's involvement in the affairs of Middle-earth began in 2941, when Gandalf coerced him into being the burglar for Thorin and Company. In the course of this adventure he went to Rivendell and other faraway places, stole the One Ring, and played an important part in the death of Smaug and the success of the expedition. He returned home to Bag End with his modest share of the dragon's hoard and the Ring, and lived a comfortable life in the Shire for sixty years. In 2980, on the death of Drogo and Primula Baggins, Bilbo adopted their son Frodo and made him his heir. In 3001, Bilbo gave a huge birthday party, the Farewell Feast, and then disappeared, leaving his goods, including the Ring, to Frodo..."
 - [Bilbo Baggins, Tolkien Gateway Entry](#)
- Frodo Baggins -
 - "(TA 2968–) Hobbit of the Shire, Ring-bearer, Elf-friend, and hero, the only son of Drogo Baggins and Primula Brandybuck. In 2980, on the death of his parents, he was adopted by his cousin Bilbo and went to live with him in Bag End. In 3001, when Bilbo left the Shire, Frodo inherited all his goods, including Bag End and the One Ring."
 - [Frodo Baggins, Tolkien Gateway Entry](#)
- Gandalf -
 - "One of the Istari, as Gandalf the Grey the second most powerful of the Order. Gandalf can be said to have been the person most responsible for the victory of the West and the downfall of Sauron in the Third Age; he labored ceaselessly and ever faithfully for two thousand years toward that goal, and by his foresight he built up many powers to oppose Sauron in the final struggle."
 - [Gandalf, Tolkien Gateway Entry](#)
- Samwise Gamgee -
 - "(TA 2980–) Hobbit of the Shire, youngest son of Hamfast Gamgee. Like his father, Sam was a gardener; he took care of Bag End when Hamfast grew old. In this way he came to know Bilbo Baggins, who told him stories of his adventures and taught him to read; from this education Sam probably derived his love of Elves and lore."
 - [Samwise Gamgee, Tolkien Gateway Entry](#)
- Peregrin Took -
 - "(TA 2990–FO c. 65) Hobbit of the Shire, the thirty-second Thain of the Shire (14–64) and a Counsellor of the North-kingdom (14–64). In his youth Pippin was a close friend of Frodo Baggins, whom he accompanied to Rivendell in 3018. There he became one of the Companions of the Ring."
 - [Peregrin Took, Tolkien Gateway Entry](#)



Main Characters

- Merry Brandybuck -
 - "(TA 2982–FO c. 65) Hobbit of the Shire, son of Saradoc Brandybuck, adventurer and Master of Buckland (FO 12–64). In his youth Merry was a close friend of Frodo Baggins, and therefore accompanied him to Rivendell in 3018. There he became one of the Companions of the Ring;"
 - [Meriadoc Brandybuck, Tolkien Gateway Entry](#)
- Tom Bombadil -
 - "A being, lord and master of the Old Forest. His race is unknown, although it is possible that he was a Maia "gone native." Certainly his power, knowledge, and joy were great enough. Tom's power within the Old Forest was absolute, and even the Ring could not affect him, but he did not go beyond the boundaries of the Forest, save for occasional visits to the Barrow-downs and the Marish."
 - [Tom Bombadil, Tolkien Gateway Entry](#)
- Strider -
 - "(TA 2931–FO 120) Dúnadan, sixteenth and last Chieftain of the Dúnedain of the North (2933–3019), restorer of the Dúnedain kingdoms in Middle-earth and, as Elessar, first King of the Reunited Kingdom (3019–FO 120). As the heir of Isildur, he was raised secretly in Rivendell and was known as Estel until he was twenty, when Elrond revealed to him his lineage. Aragorn then went off into the Wild; for nearly seventy years he fought against Sauron in many ways and learned the customs of various peoples, until he was the hardest and the wisest Man of his time..."
 - [Aragorn, Tolkien Gateway Entry](#)
- Glorfindel -
 - (fl. TA 1975–) "Eldarin lord of great power, probably of the House of Finarfin. At the time of the WR Glorfindel seems to have been the second most important Elf, after Elrond, in Rivendell. Glorfindel led the Elvish force that helped rout Angmar in the Battle of Fornost in TA 1975. In 3018 he met and protected Frodo and his companions on their way to Rivendell, and he fought the Nazgûl at the Ford of Bruinen."
 - [Glorfindel, Tolkien Gateway Entry](#)



Ch. I: A Long-Expected Party

Sixty years after returning to Bag End after his unexpected adventure, Bilbo Baggins has become a legend among hobbits. Though nearing his eleventy-first birthday, he has not aged visibly since he was fifty; his unexplained youth and wealth have become a popular topic of gossip throughout the Shire.

As the 22nd of September draws closer, all of Hobbiton is busy making preparations for a party of special magnificence: a combined birthday celebration for Bilbo and his nephew and heir, Frodo. As packages and parcels pour into Bag End, Gandalf the wizard also arrives in the Shire, though he comes with "far more difficult and dangerous" business than anyone realizes.

The Baggins' celebration exceeds all expectations as gifts are generously given to all of the guests, several hearty meals are served, and Gandalf's fireworks light up the evening sky. At a special supper set apart for family, the hobbits eat to their heart's content and then brace themselves for Bilbo's birthday speech.

However, his speech comes to an unsettling end as he announces, "This is the end. I am going. I am leaving NOW. GOOD-BYE!!!" and vanishes, followed by a blinding flash of light.

Gandalf returns to Bag End to find Bilbo making his final preparations to leave the Shire. As an old friend, Gandalf counsels Bilbo to leave behind the Ring. Though agreeing at first, his heart changes and he becomes angry with Gandalf. However, he ultimately chooses to leave the Ring behind of his own will.

Frodo returns home later that night where he finds Gandalf sitting alone beside the fire, and realizes that Bilbo has finally gone. Gandalf explains he has left all of Bag End, including his Ring, to Frodo. Gandalf warns him not to use the Ring, to keep it safe and secret, and that he must leave to learn more about its nature.



Ch. 2: The Shadow of the Past

Though several years have now passed since his disappearance Frodo continues to give birthday parties for Bilbo, insisting he does not believe Bilbo is dead. While Frodo remains in Bag End, his mind begins to wander to distant lands and he becomes more peculiar in the eyes of his neighbors.

After nine years away, Gandalf suddenly returns to Bag End. He begins to explain what he has come to understand about Bilbo's Ring: its history, how Bilbo came to find it, and its great power. He recounts the story of how the Ring came to Sméagol, how immediately the Ring took hold of his heart. Sméagol's lust for the Ring caused him to murder his dear friend and eventually become a wretched creature known as 'Gollum'. Gandalf tells of how the Ring chose to leave Gollum and was, by a chance of fate, picked up by Bilbo.

The Ring gave Gollum abilities according to his stature:

- Tolkien writes that before he even came to find the Ring: "He was interested in roots and beginnings; he dived into deep pools; he burrowed under trees and growing plants; he tunneled into green mounds; and he ceased to look up at the hill-tops, or the leaves on trees, or the flowers opening in the air: his head and eyes were downward."
- And when Sméagol had the Ring: "He used it to find out secrets, and he put his knowledge to crooked and malicious uses..." until eventually he 'wormed his way like a maggot' into the Misty Mountains, thinking to himself, "The roots of those mountains must be roots indeed; there must be great secrets buried there which not have been discovered since the beginning."

Gandalf tells Frodo that the Ring cannot stay in the Shire, and though he is filled with dread, Frodo agrees to carry the Ring to Rivendell. As the chapter draws to a close, Gandalf chooses Samwise Gamgee to accompany Frodo on his journey.



Ch. 3: Three is Company

Guided by Gandalf's counsel, Frodo begins preparations to leave the Shire. He sells Bag End to the Sackville-Baggins and purchases a small home in Crickhollow, although he does not actually intend to live in it. Gandalf leaves once again, promising to return before autumn, but is not heard from again in this chapter..

Frodo finally sets out walking along with Samwise and Pippin, toward Crickhollow the day after his Fiftieth birthday.

Frodo, Sam, and Pippin travel on foot through the woods, walking leisurely and taking their time. As they travel slowly, the hobbits hear a horse coming down the road, and Frodo urges them to scramble off the road to get out of sight. As they hide, Frodo watches as a dark, faceless figure sitting upon a black horse rides slowly towards them. In the presence of this Black Rider, Frodo is filled with dread and a nearly overwhelming desire to put on the Ring. However, they are not discovered by the Rider and continue on.

Soon forgetting their danger, they walk further along and Frodo begins to sing a walking song. At once they hear the sound of hoofs, and soon see a shadow crawling towards them. But the shadow is scared away by the sudden singing of Elves along the road. The elves welcome them as friends, offering them food, drink, and a safe place to rest for the night.

Gildor offers Frodo unsettling advice (if you could even call it 'advice'), though he is thankful for his company and counsel.

Though Frodo sees the Shire as a refuge from the dangers of the world, he soon comes to understand that even the safety and familiarity of the Shire cannot forever shield him from the Enemy.

Gildor counsels him, "But it is not your own Shire... The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot for ever fence it out." Frodo comes to better understand the strength of Sauron, realizing the depth of his quest and how desperately he needs courage.



Ch. 4: A Short Cut to Mushrooms

After spending the night in the protection of the Elves, the hobbits awake refreshed in body and spirit. However, Frodo is troubled over the thought of bringing his friends with him into such grave danger.

As they continue to scramble through the woods to avoid the Black Rider, the hobbits find themselves walking through the farmlands of the Farmer Maggot. Frodo is dreadfully terrified of Farmer Maggot's dogs as he had been caught stealing mushrooms as a child. Yet Maggot welcomes the hobbits warmly, inviting them for dinner.

Inside, Maggot tells them of a strange man who had been asking for Mr. Baggins, and Frodo struggles to keep his errand a secret. After dinner, Maggot offers to give the hobbits a ride to the ferry in his wagon, for which they are very grateful. Along the road they are met by a hooded rider and filled with terror, until they are overjoyed to realize it was their very own Merry Brandybuck! Reunited, they travel together to Frodo's home at Crickhollow.



Ch. 5: A Conspiracy Unmasked

Frodo, Sam, and Pippin are reunited with Merry and together they travel to Crickhollow. Arriving at Crickhollow, they are welcomed by the warmth and comfort of Frodo's newly purchased home.

Surrounded by his belongings and good friends, Frodo wishes dearly that he could stay, and dreads telling his friends of his true intentions to leave.

After baths, the hobbits eat a hearty dinner, and afterwards pull up their chairs beside the fire to talk. Pippin and Sam recount the events of the past few days, while Frodo struggles to remain silent.

Finally, he attempts to tell his friends of his burden and his quest, but instead they reveal that they already know of it! Yet when Frodo explains that he intends to leave without them, Sam, Pippin, and Merry assure him that they've already planned to go with him.

Even after warning them of their grave danger, Frodo's friends are committed to help him. Greatly relieved, Frodo plans to start off the following morning through the Old Forest. While Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin prepare to leave, Fatty Bolger remains behind in case Gandalf should come. As they rest for the night, Frodo sleeps uneasily and has strange dreams.

"But it does not seem that I can trust anyone," said Frodo. Sam looked at him unhappily, "It all depends on what you want," put in Merry. "You can trust us to stick to you through thick and thin - to the bitter end. And you can trust us to keep any secret of yours - closer than you keep it yourself. But you cannot trust us to let you face trouble alone, and go off without a word. We are your friends, Frodo... We are horribly afraid - but we are coming with you; or following you like hounds."



Ch. 6: The Old Forest

Early the next morning, the hobbits (minus Fatty) leave quietly through the mist toward a hidden entrance to the Old Forest. They find the forest just as strange as the stories told; trees seem to shift as they pass through, leading them down a path which brings them deeper into the heart of the forest. Despite their efforts, the hobbits find themselves in the middle of the Forest, at the River Withywindle.

As Merry leads them, the hobbits soon grow hot and incredibly tired. Merry and Pippin lean against the trunk of a great willow tree and fall into a deep sleep. Frodo dips his feet into the water to cool his toes, and suddenly falls asleep with his back against a tree. Sam struggles to stay awake, growing even more suspicious of the trees, until he hears a great splash and finds Frodo has fallen into the river.

After rescuing him, Frodo tells Sam he believes the tree threw him into the water. Suddenly, they realize Merry and Pippin have been swallowed up into the cracks of the willow tree. The hobbits make a small fire to free their friends, but Merry begs them to put out the fire or the tree will squeeze him in two.

Frodo cries frantically for help, though he does not know to what end. Suddenly, when all hope is lost, they hear the merry voice of Tom Bombadil singing as he walks in the forest. Tom hears Frodo's cry for help and quickly rescues Merry and Pippin from Old Man Willow, using only his song to command the trees. After freeing them, he continues to sing, walking ahead of them and calling for them to follow.



Ch. 7: In the House of Tom Bombadil

The hobbits step into the home of Tom Bombadil and stand in awe of their surroundings. Before them sits Goldberry, daughter of the River, who greets them warmly and welcomes them into the safety of their home.

After dinner, Goldberry bids them goodnight, and the hobbits sit with Tom for a long while. They talk for a bit, but Tom tells them that many things are best left until morning, and so he leads them to their beds.

“‘Have peace now,’ she said, ‘until the morning! Heed no nightly noises! For nothing passes door and window here save moonlight and starlight and the wind off the hill-top. Good night!’” – Goldberry

Frodo dreams uneasily, though he is comforted by the words of Goldberry. In the morning, they enjoy a hearty breakfast and are gladdened by the sound of rain outside as it will delay their departure. They sit again with Tom and he explains much about the Forest, telling them of the cunning of the Great Willow; then, his stories turn to the Great Barrows, the Barrow-wights, and more. The hobbits sit as if in a trance, and Frodo asks Tom Bombadil, “Who are you, Master?”

Tom answers that he is the Eldest, here before all – even the Dark Lord. After the rain comes to an end, Tom and Goldberry serve a great supper to the hobbits, and they talk for much longer. At his request, Frodo shows the Ring to Tom, who is unaffected by its power in any way! That evening, the hobbits prepare to depart from Tom’s home, planning to head north at his advice the next morning.



Ch. 8: Fog on the Barrow-Downs

After breakfast, the hobbits bid farewell to Tom Bombadil and Goldberry and continue towards the Barrow-downs. In the afternoon they rest and eat lunch in the grass, falling into an unexpected sleep. They awaken surrounded by an unsettling fog and try to lead their ponies toward the road.

However, instead of coming to the end of the Barrow-downs, Frodo finds himself passing between two ominous standing stones. When he looks back, Frodo realizes he has become separated from the others. He finds himself standing, unable to move, before a great barrow and watches as a tall dark figure seizes him with an icy grip. Frodo awakens in a barrow, taken by a Barrow-wight.

For a moment he is overcome with terror and dread, but he is soon filled with an unexpected sense of courage. He turns to see Sam, Merry, and Pippin lying beside him clad in white and surrounded by many treasures. He hears a song growing in the darkness, becoming an incantation, and sees a long arm crawling towards them.

For a moment, Frodo imagines himself escaping with the Ring and leaving his friends behind. But he knows that the courage in his heart has grown too strong and he could not leave his friends. Taking the sword, Frodo swings at the crawling arm and cuts it off at the wrist. In the darkness, he remembers Tom Bombadil and calls for him.

Tom Bombadil immediately rescues the hobbits, awakening Sam, Merry, and Pippin with his song. Afterward, Tom walks beside them until they reach the road, and then the hobbits continue alone towards The Prancing Pony.



Ch. 9: At the Sign of the Prancing Pony

After saying goodbye to Tom Bombadil, the hobbits continue on towards Bree. The hobbits make for The Prancing Pony where they hope to find Gandalf, but are disappointed to learn he hasn't arrived or been heard from. After settling into their accommodations, they join the rest of the guests in the common-room (although Merry instead plans to go for a walk). There, Frodo notices a 'strange-looking weather-beaten man' watching and listening to the hobbits. He learns from Mr. Butterbur that he is a Ranger called Strider.

Frodo approaches him but is distracted by Pippin as he recounts the story of Bilbo's farewell party. In an attempt to draw the attention away from Pippin, Frodo leaps onto a table and begins to give a short speech, followed by a song. As he sings, he leaps into the air, falling off of the table and disappearing without a trace. The Ring had slipped onto his finger unexpectedly, and his disappearance causes quite a commotion within the tavern.

Frodo takes off the Ring, reappearing and trying to convince Mr. Butterbur that it was all a misunderstanding. However, the patrons of The Prancing Pony have grown quite upset over it all, and Frodo decides to return to his room.



Ch. 10: Strider

Frodo, Pippin, and Sam return to their parlour, unknowingly accompanied by Strider. He explains that he already knows a great deal about their secret, and that he had been looking for a Mr. Frodo Baggins. He warns them that they are being closely pursued by the Black Riders, urging them to leave Bree in the morning and asking if they will have him as their guide. Although the hobbits initially distrust Strider, Frodo continues asking questions and trying to discern his path.

Mr. Butterbur delivers a letter from Gandalf (one which he was meant to send three months ago). In the letter, Gandalf explains that he must leave at once and urges Frodo to leave the Shire before the end of July. He also mentions that they may meet a friend on the road called Strider, and he will help them along the way to Rivendell. In the postscript of his letter, Gandalf writes a short poem about Strider, whose true name is Aragorn.

After reading the letter Frodo decides to trust Strider, who vows, "I am Aragorn son of Arathorn; and if by life or death I can save you, I will." Strider plans to travel first to Weathertop, where they will then have to choose between great perils as they continue to Rivendell.

Soon Merry rushes into their room, saying he had seen the Black Riders in the village. Strider warns them not to return to their rooms, instead suggesting they remain together in the parlour and bar the windows and doors. Heeding Strider's advice, the hobbits sleep on the floor beside the fire as Strider sits watch.



Ch. II: A Knife in the Dark

Back at Frodo's home at Crickhollow, Fatty Bolger is filled with a growing fear. Night deepens, the leaves stir, and a menacing voice calls to the door, "Open, in the name of Mordor!" Fatty wastes no time, running out the back door towards the nearest home to sound the alarm. The Black Riders burst open the door, rushing into the home to find it empty, then returning to their horses just as swiftly.

In Bree, Strider awakens the hobbits and shows them to their bedrooms, where the windows had been forced open, the beds and linens were torn, and the brown mat which lay as a dummy was ripped to pieces. The hobbits are glad they heeded Strider's advice to sleep in the common room, and agree they should leave at once.

After their own ponies had been scared away by the Black Riders, Mr. Butterbur purchases Bill Ferny's pony for the hobbits on their journey. After breakfast, they leave Bree and begin to follow Strider as he leads them along the way. They soon come to Midgewater Marshes, where they spend days miserably scrambling and being bitten by midges.

Eventually, they finally come to Weathertop where they make camp and sit beside the fire. Frodo is filled with a sudden fear, and Merry reports that he saw two or three black shapes moving towards them. Frodo is overcome with the desire to put on the Ring and when he does, everything changes. He sees before him five tall figures, robed in grey and carrying swords of steel.

As one of them comes upon him, he cries out, "O Elbereth! Gilthoniel!", striking at the figure's feet. But soon he feels an icy pierce of a sword into his left shoulder. With the last gasp of his strength, Frodo pulls the Ring from his finger.



Ch.12: Flight to the Ford

As Frodo pulls the Ring from his finger, he returns to himself, though gravely wounded. Strider instructs the hobbits to keep Frodo safe while he searches for leaves of the Athelas plant to treat his wound. When he returns, he throws the leaves into boiling water and washes Frodo's shoulder with it.

They journey towards Rivendell, though moving slowly through wild and pathless lands. Sam's fear for Frodo's life grows with each passing day. As they continue, they find themselves at a troll-hole, where the very trolls which had been turned to stone on Bilbo's great adventure still stand!

At this, their hearts and spirits are lifted, if only for a moment. As they continue on, they hear the sound of hoofs drawing near but they are relieved to see that it is not a Black Rider but an elf named Glorfindel. He explains that he had been sent from Rivendell to look for them, and he urges Frodo to ride ahead of them on his horse.

As they draw close to the river, Glorfindel senses that the enemy is upon them. In their presence, Frodo hesitates to flee. Realizing that he is being silently commanded by the Black Riders to wait, "fear and hatred awoke in him." He draws his sword, but Glorfindel commands his horse to continue to run.

Frodo makes it across the Ford, but the Riders are close behind. As one Rider approaches him, Frodo draws his sword and cries, "Go back to the Land of Mordor, and follow me no more!" The Black Riders call for the Ring and continue to cross through the water, but they are overcome by a sudden 'cavalry of waves' crested with white flames. As Frodo watches, he feels himself falling, and sees no more.



Large File Size Map of Middle-earth

