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Opening extract from

The Hobbit Companion

Written by

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Illustrated by

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Published by

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To Alan and Jean Day on their 50th Anniversary,
and Brian and Mariette Day on their 10th Anniversary

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THE TOLKIEN SOCIETY

Honorary President: the late professor J. R. R. Tolkien C.B.E. in perpetuo

Founded in London, England, in 1969, The Tolkien Society provides a meeting point for all those who value the works of Professor J. R. R. Tolkien. The Society is an independent educational charity, run by and for Professor Tolkien's admirers.

Members are kept in touch by the bi-monthly bulletin magazine *Amon Hen*. Our annual journal, *Mallorn*, contains longer papers and members' own stories, poetry and artwork.

The society organizes three major meetings a year: Oxenmoot in Oxford in September; the AGM and dining in the spring and the seminar in the summer. Local groups or "smials" have been set up throughout the world.

Details of subscription rates in the UK and elsewhere can be obtained from the Tolkien Society (PB), Annie Howard, St Peter's College, Oxford, OX1 2DL. Questions about J. R. R. Tolkien's life and works are also welcome. Please enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope or (from outside the UK) an international reply coupon.

David Day is the author of *A Tolkien Bestiary* (which has sold over a million copies in twenty languages since its publication in 1979),*Tolkien's Ring*, *Tolkien: The Illustrated Encyclopedia*, *The Hobbit Companion*, *Tolkien's World*; as well as the *Quest for King Arthur and Castles* (*illustrated by Alan Lee*). He has always been fascinated by the vast complexities of Tolkien's mythology; particularly in light of the many posthumously published Tolkien manuscripts. David Day has also published more than thirty other books in the fields of ecology, poetry, natural history, fantasy, mythology, and a number of award-winning children's books.

Lidia Postma is a Dutch illustrator of both children and adult fantasy books and is highly regarded throughout Europe, America and the UK.

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I. In the beginning was *The Word:* 'HOBBIT'

It came into being on a certain fateful summer afternoon in Oxfordshire in 1930. It was not exactly an invented word, but nobody had ever really used it in quite the way Professor J. R. R. Tolkien did when he scribbled it down on a scrap of paper in his study at Number Twenty Northmoor Road in suburban Oxford.

The word *Hobbit* was soon to be as much a magical word for Professor Tolkien as *Hocus-Pocus* was for any fairy-tale magician. In fact, Hobbit was the most important single word that ever inspired him to invent a story.

Most authors create characters and then find names for them, but Professor Tolkien's mind reversed that order. He always acknowledged that it was words themselves that suggested characters, creatures, races, species, plots, places, and entire worlds to him.

Above all things, J. R. R. Tolkien was a scholar who studied words~a philologist~and he was one of the compilers of the prestigious *Oxford English Dictionary*. Consequently, in his creative fiction, words themselves proved to be his chief source of inspiration.

This was absolutely true of his new word: Hobbit.

What do we really know about the arrival of Tolkien's Hobbit? Superficially, not much. Tolkien himself tells us about the moment of the word's delivery. He makes it sound like an unannounced and anonymous letter~with no postmark and no return address~dropped into his mailbox.

"All I remember about the start of *The Hobbit* is sitting correcting School Certificate papers in the everlasting weariness of that annual task forced on impecunious academics with children. On a blank leaf I scrawled: 'In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.' I did not and do not know why."

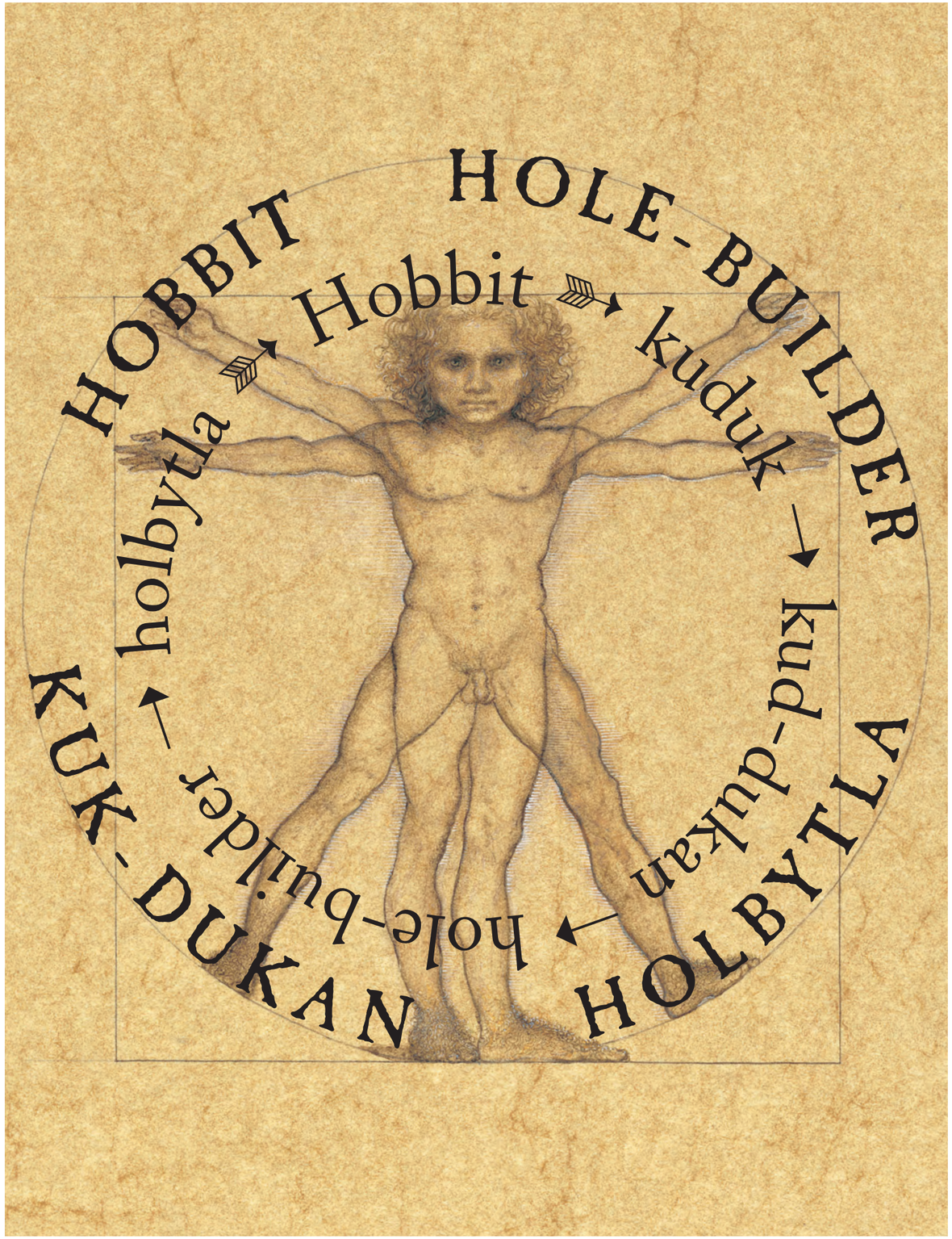
The human imagination is a complex and peculiar thing: part magpie and part magician. It is common for authors and artists blessed with creative powers to refuse to tamper with the imagination. However, Tolkien was also a trained scholar, and he actually knew a lot about the forces that shaped the Hobbit and his world. Many years after *The Hobbit* had been published Tolkien wrote expansively about this seminal moment.

"One of the candidates had mercifully left one of the pages with no writing on it (which is the best thing that can possibly happen to an examiner) and I wrote on it: 'In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.' Names always generate a story in my mind. Eventually I thought I'd better find out what hobbits were like. But that's only the beginning."

So, Tolkien himself said it: in the beginning was the word~Hobbit. Furthermore, in his writing, "I thought I'd better find out what hobbits were like," we can clearly see Tolkien's creative mental process at work. Many authors talk about creating a character, but whenever someone asked Tolkien about a character (or a race or a thing or a place) that was named but not yet fleshed out in the text of his stories, he would invariably say, "I'll go and try to find out more about it."

That is, Tolkien behaved as if that character (or thing or place) existed in a sort of parallel world where its whole nature was waiting to be discovered and recorded in the most minute detail. Tolkien did not see his job as a writer as being that of a creator but that of an explorer and chronicler of an already existing world that awaited discovery through the language itself.

This book is an exploration of the inspirational power of language. It proposes that the entire body of Tolkien's writing dealing with Hobbits was essentially the product of a list of associations with the word Hobbit. Thus, the invention of the word "Hobbit" resulted in the creation of the character, race and world of the Hobbit.



If this appears to be a peculiar form of circular thinking, that is exactly what is intended. Tolkien invents a philological origin for the word Hobbit as a worn-down form of an original invented word *holbytla* (which is actually an Old English construct) meaning "hole-builder." Therefore, the opening line of *The Hobbit* is meant as an obscure lexicographical joke. It is a deliberate tautology: "In a hole in the ground there lived a hole-builder."

☞*"In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit."*
Hobbit ' hole-builder

To take the circular approach a stage further, one can look at the Modern English word *hole*, which is derived from the Old English *hollow*. By bizarre coincidence, hollow originally came from the Old German *hohl*~pronounced "hole."

Not content with the spiral ending there, Tolkien couldn't resist adding a few more twists by stating that the word hobbit as a worn-down form of holbytla was not used by the Hobbits themselves. In their own Hobbitish speech they were known as *kuduk*, a worn-down version of *kud-dukan*~meaning "hole-builder"~which were Gothic constructs that Tolkien derived from the Prehistoric German word *khulaz*.

This brings us round full circle, because *khulaz*, meaning hollow, is the original source for the Old German *hohl*, the Old English hollow, and the Modern English hole!*

Throughout this book we will see countless examples of Tolkien's endless fascination with obscure philological humour, but more importantly, it will also demonstrate how Tolkien's obsession with words was a constant source of creative inspiration for him. Words had an almost magical significance that suggested endless creative possibilities. Consequently, this book is primarily about words and language, and how they can provoke and inspire.



Centre: Bungo Baggins, architect of Bag End and father of Bilbo Baggins

*As if this were not complicated enough, Professor Tolkien added other factors: among Men and Elves, Hobbits were usually noted by their size (half-human size, thus *halflings*) rather than by their holes.
Therefore: *Kuduk* (Hobbit) in Hobbitish translates as *Periannath* (Halfling-Folk) in Sindarin of Elves, which relates to *Periain* (Halfling) in Sindarin of Elves, which is *Banakil* (Halfling) in Westron of Men, and returns to Hobbit (Kuduk) in English.

II. *Dictionary* HOCUS~POCUS

In most dictionaries Tolkien's magic word Hobbit appears directly after the word Hoax, which was originally a shortened form of the magic word Hocus-Pocus. Interestingly enough, Hoax has come to mean "a trick, a practical joke or fabricated tale."

This is not an accident. The story of *The Hobbit* is, after all, a fabricated tale that Tolkien went to great lengths to present as a translation of an ancient historic manuscript, rather than a novel. Clearly, he mischievously enjoyed the idea of creating an elaborate and literary hoax.

Indeed, after we exclude Tolkien's word Hobbit and look at the thirteen words that follow Hoax from Hob to Hobo, it is easy to see that Tolkien was inspired by this simple list of words to shape almost every aspect of the Hobbit's character.

Tolkien's "discovery" of the Hobbit character through clues supplied by this list of words is typical of his creative logic and might be described as an elaborate and extended philological joke.

In fact, by saying "Hocus-Pocus" over the dictionary we find we can embark on an adventure that duplicates that of his novel with one Hobbit and thirteen Dwarves called Hob, Hobble, Hobbledehoy, Hobbler, Hobby, Hobbyhorse, Hobgoblin, Hobiler, Hobit, Hoblike, Hobnail, Hobnob, and Hobo.

All thirteen of these Dwarf-words have several meanings, and most are homonyms (words that sound alike but have different meanings and unrelated origins). However, whatever their nature, every one of these words has contributed to the creation and evolution of the Hobbit and his world.

If you doubt this, simply take a look at how the *Chambers Concise Dictionary*, for instance, currently defines Hobbit:

> Hobbit~One of a race of imaginary beings, half human size, hole-dwelling and hairy-footed, invented by J. R. R. Tolkien in his novel *The Hobbi*t, 1937.

A race of imaginary beings: A Hob is a fairy, an elf, an imaginary being.
Half human size: A Hobbledehoy is a stripling, half-man and half-boy.
Hole-dwelling and hairy-footed: A Hob is a male ferret~a half-tame variety of polecat kept for driving rabbits from burrows. (That is, hairy-footed hole-dwellers who drive other hairy-footed hole-dwellers from their holes.)

If this isn't convincing you, try to imagine almost everything you know about Hobbits and see if the thirteen words following Hoax don't have something to do with those characteristics. Let us take a look at these words and see what else they can tell us about our imaginary Hobbits.

The word Hob tells us Hobbits are hill-dwellers, hole-dwellers, and half human size.

Hill-dweller: Hob comes from the root word hump, originally Low German, meaning hill. Australian humpy means hut.
Hole-dweller: Hob is a spirit that builds its home in a hollow hill. Ancient round barrows are often called Hob's Houses.



Half human size: Hob or Hobmen is the generic name for various types of rather benign Hobs or Brownies; these are man-like, hairy and roughly three foot tall and hole-dwelling.

The words Hobnob, Hobbyhorse, Hobble tell us Hobbits love to drink, gossip, dance, and to tell riddles.

Love of drink and gossip: Hobnob means to drink and gossip together.
Love of dancing: Hobbyhorse is a medieval morris dancer.
Love of riddles: Hobble is to perplex.

The words Hoblike, Hobnail, Hobble, Hobbyhorse, and Hobby tell us Hobbits are comic, rustic, stubborn, whimsical, and eccentric.

Comic: Hoblike is clownish, boorish.
Rustic: Hobnail is a country clodhopper.
Stubborn: Hobble is to impede, to create difficulty.
Whimsical: Hobbyhorsical means whimsical, amusing.
Eccentric: Hobbyist is one committed to pleasurable, eccentric, and often pointless amateur activities.

The words Hobby and Hobit tell us Hobbits are keen-eyed marksmen with slings and arrows.

Keen-sighted, hawk-eyed: Hobby is from the French hobet and the Latin hobetus meaning a small hunting falcon.
Excellent shot with stones: Hobit is a howitzer or catapult.
Excellent archers: Hobit is a catapult; linked to the Welsh hobel meaning arrow.

The words Hobgoblin and Hobiler tell us Hobbits are Royalists and Elf-friends.

Elf-friend, Orc-enemy: Hobgoblin means literally an Elf (Hob)-Goblin (Orc).
Loyal Royalist Soldiers: Hobiler is a medieval light-armed militiaman sworn to the service of a king. He seldom fought in battles, but often used to carry intelligence and reconnoitre.



Melilot Brandybuck

The words Hobbiler, Hobbler, and Hob tell us Hobbits are farmers, rivermen, and woodsmen.

Harfoots Hobbits are farmers: Hobbiler is a feudal tenant farmer and soldier.
Stoors Hobbits are rivermen: Hobbler is someone who tows a vessel with a rope, either along a bank or with a rowboat.
Fallohides Hobbits are woodsmen: Hob or Hob-i-t–hurst is a Brownie or Elf of the woods.

The word Hobo tells us Hobbits were once a wandering race of migrant farm workers.

Hobbits during Wandering Years: Hobo is "one who works and wanders."
Hobbit as tillers of the soil: Hobo originated as "Hoe Boy" or itinerant farm worker.

III. *Enter* Bilbo Baggins

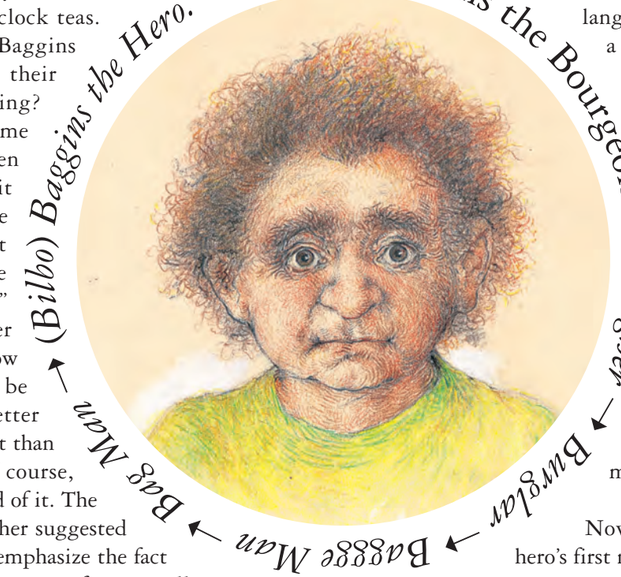
The first and original Hobbit created by J. R. R. Tolkien was a certain gentlehobbit by the name of Bilbo Baggins. We have examined the word Hobbit and observed what that word contributed to the race. Now let us examine the given names of the quintessential Hobbit, Mr Bilbo Baggins, and see what they contribute to his character and his race.

First, let's take a look at the family name: *Baggins*.

Baggins → *afternoon tea, a substantial snack between meals*

We can see from the opening scenes of *The Hobbit* that Hobbits seem to like nothing better than snacking between meals; and they are especially addicted to extensive four o'clock teas. Did the name Baggins give Hobbits their habit of over-eating? Or, was the name Baggins chosen because Hobbit eating habits were already known? It is one of those "chicken and egg" riddles. Whatever way around, it now seems it would be hard to find a better name for a Hobbit than Baggins. But, of course, that is not the end of it. The name Baggins either suggested or was chosen to emphasize the fact that Bilbo Baggins came from a well-to-do family. Just as Hobb(it) is a diminutive of Hob or Hobb, so Bagg(ins) is a diminutive of Bag or Bagg, the eponymous progenitor of the Baggins family. Certainly, in British nomenclature, Baggins has its origin in the Middle English Somerset surname Bagg, meaning money-bag.

Bagg → *"money-bag, pack, bundle"*



The theme of "money-bag" is repeated in the name of Bilbo's father, Bungo Baggins. The root for Bungo is bung, which first entered the English language in 1566 as *Bunge*, a purse, but by 1610 we are told "Bung is now used for a pocket, heretofore for a purse." Furthermore, we can deduce that Bungo's purse was substantial, for with its contents Bungo built the great manor of Bag End, and had enough for his son Bilbo to be more than comfortable.

Now let us look at our hero's first name: Bilbo.

Bilbo → *short sword or rapier*

The word *bilbo* came to English in the fifteenth century through the name Balboa, a Portuguese city

once renowned for the making of delicate swords of flexible, but almost unbreakable steel. In Shakespearean times, a bilbo was a short but deadly piercing sword, a small thrusting rapier.

This is an excellent description of Bilbo's sword the charmed Elf knife called Sting. Found in a Troll hoard, Bilbo's bilbo was forged by the ancient Elven smith Telchar and gave off a blue light in the presence of evil. It had a charmed Elven blade that could pierce through armour or animal hide that would break any other sword.

The name Bilbo apparently immediately suggested certain actions in the plot to Tolkien, because in the first draft of *The Hobbit* we find that Bilbo's bilbo, Sting, is the instrument of the Dragon's destruction when it is thrust into the small unarmoured spot in the monster's belly.

Although this plot was abandoned in the final version of *The Hobbit*, the weapon proved critical to the plot of the *The Lord of the Rings*, when another Hobbit (Samwise Gamgee) uses Sting to deliver a mortal blow by piercing the belly of the monstrous spider, Shelob the Great.

In *The Hobbit*, however, it was sharp wit rather than a sharp sword that gave Bilbo the edge. Whether to escape from Orcs, Elves, Gollum, or the Dragon, Bilbo's wits allowed him to solve riddles and trick villains. In the end, the Dragon's downfall came through Bilbo exploiting the monster's vanity by means of a "sting," or confidence trick, that resulted in the discovery of how the Dragon might be slain.

When we put the two names together~Bilbo Baggins~we have two aspects of our hero's character, and to some degree the character of Hobbits in general. On the face of it, the name Baggins suggests a harmless, well-to-do, contented character; while the name Bilbo suggests an individual who is sharp, intelligent, and even a little dangerous.

Superficially and initially, Bilbo Baggins is presented as a mildly comic, home-loving, rustic, middle-class gentlehobbit. He is harmless and obsequious, full of gossip, homely wisdom, wordy euphemisms, and elaborate family histories. He is largely concerned with home comforts, village f^etes, dinner parties, flower gardens, vegetable plots, and grain harvests.

Bilbo Baggins is a comic antihero who goes off on a journey into a heroic world. It is a world where the commonplace knocks up against the heroic. One has to see that values are different in these worlds. In Bilbo Baggins we have a character with modern everyday sensibilities that the reader may identify with while having an adventure in an ancient heroic world.

However, there is something different and contrary about Bilbo Baggins's nature: he is a typical Hobbit full of practical common sense, but but has a cutting edge. That is the reason he was chosen by Gandalf the Magician to be hired out as a freelance "hero-burglar" by the Dwarves on their Quest.

Epic versus Everyday:
Hero → *Burglar*
Burglar → *Criminal in everyday society*
Burglar → *Hero in epic society*

Why was it thought that Bilbo Baggins would make a good burglar to assist the Dwarves in the theft of the Dragon's treasure?

Here we have Tolkien involved in word play again: Bilbo Baggins was a burgher who became a burglar. Burgher was a freeman of a burgh or borough (or in the case of Hobbits a burrow), which certainly applied to Bilbo Baggins. Even more, its derivative Bourgeois described a person with humdrum middle-class ideas.

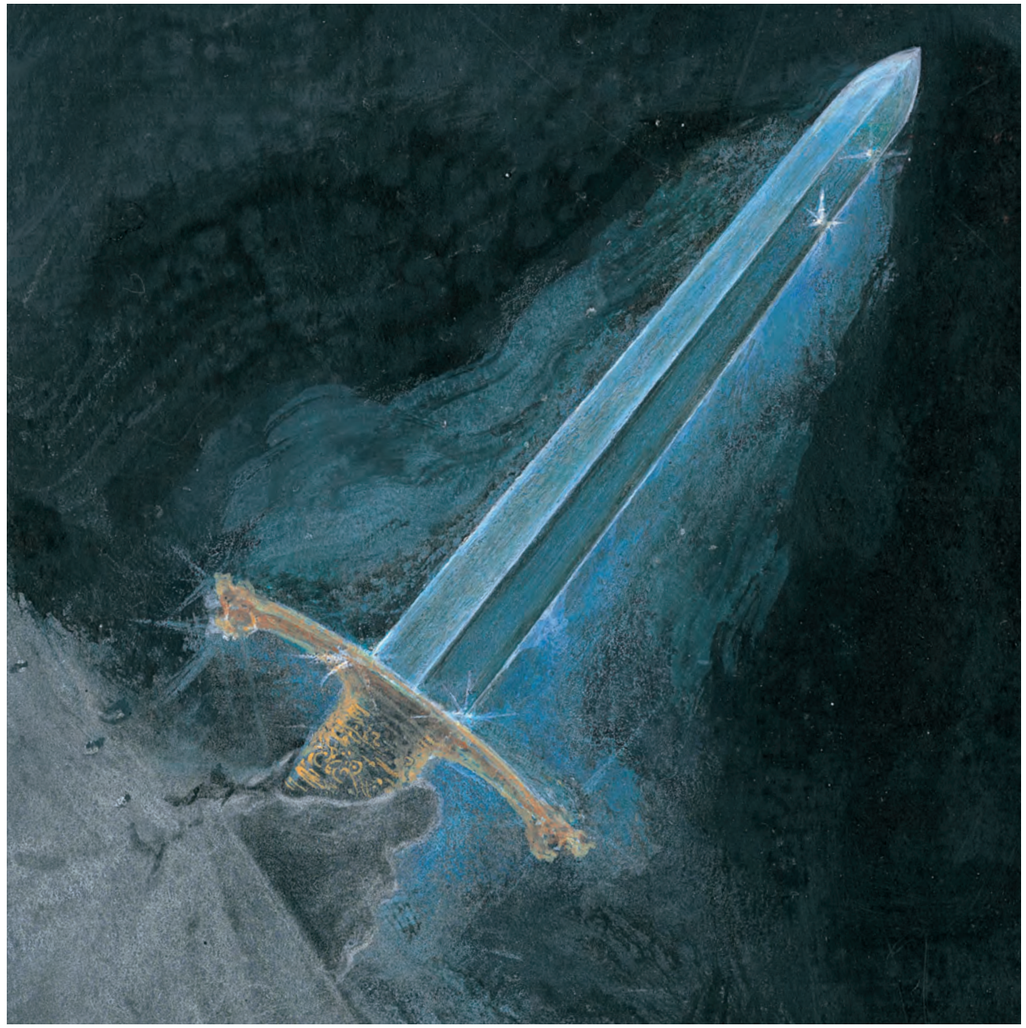
The Germanic root word *burg* means "mound, fort, stockaded "house."

Burgher → *one who owns a house*
Burglar → *one who plunders a house*

So, we have the everyday humdrum middle-class burgher entering an epic world and being transformed into his opposite, a burglar.

Even so, we are not quite through. There are still other links in underworld jargon between Bagg and Baggins and the words bag and baggage as used by working criminals in Britain. Three are quite notable: to bag means to capture, to acquire or to steal; baggage man is the outlaw who carries off the loot or booty; and a bag man is the man who collects and distributes money on behalf of others by dishonest means, or for dishonest purposes.

It appears that Tolkien's choice of names for his Hobbit hero not only helped to create the character of Bilbo Baggins, but also went a long way toward plotting the adventure his hero embarked on.



For in *The Hobbit*, we find Bilbo Baggins the burglar is hired by the Dwarves to bag the Dragon's treasure. He then becomes the baggage man who carries off the loot. However, after the death of the Dragon and because of a dispute after the Battle of Five Armies, Bilbo Baggins becomes the bag man who collects the whole treasure together and distributes it among the victors.

(Bilbo) Baggins the Bourgeois → *Burgher* → *Burglar* → *Baggage Man* → *Bag Man* → (Bilbo) Baggins the Hero

What is in a name? In the name Baggins we have a Baggins who was a borough-burrow-dwelling bourgeois burgher who, by hiring himself out as a professional burglar, baggage man, and bag man, became that most un-Hobbitish of creatures: a hero.