

# AN UNEXPECTEDLY CHANGED JOURNEY

An Attempt to Explain the Story Alterations to "The  
Hobbit" in the First Part of Peter Jackson's Movie

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A book can never be adapted to film without any changes. History of film has taught us that since the early beginnings, i. e. the Jules Verne adaption of "A Trip to the Moon" by Georges Méliès in 1902 or the "Harry Potter" movies of current days. To omit parts of the story in order to better focus on the development of a main story line or the main character is a working method to create films that are accepted by a broad audience as "worth watching" or even "good", which in the end of course guarantees a higher financial outcome for the producers.

"The Lord of the Rings" has been another example of this way of adaption (i. e. omitting the Old Forest and the Barrow Downs), although Peter Jackson carefully managed to integrate some left-out aspects in other parts of the film, i. e. the industrialization of The Shire now appears as a vision in Galadriel's mirror in "Fellowship" (but should have been at the end of "Return of the King"), or the willow tree from the Old Forest that now grows on Treebeard's Hill.

There are more examples, but it rarely happens that entire story arcs are added to a movie. This happened in the first part of "The Hobbit" (which also comes as a three-part movie). Also, there are changes in the story that are mainly caused by the additions. This article is trying to list the changes to the book and then tries to explain the alterations and additions by using secondary tales written by Tolkien. With those, the story that is remembered to be a lovely fairy-tale becomes entangled in a complex setting and is not trivial.

# 1 Changes to the Book

As a start, the primary changes to the book shall be listed (this is not a complete list).

1. While the book's beginning with the coming of the dwarves to Bag End (Bilbo's home) is explicitly close to the book, the prologue and some parts of the story that the dwarves tell at Bilbo's table is not / not as explicitly described in the book. This refers especially to the albino orc Azog, fighting the dwarves at the gates of Moria. In the book, that orc is referred to as being a goblin:

[Gandalf said,] "Your grandfather Thror was killed, you remember, in the mines of Moria by Azog the Goblin -"

"Curse his name, yes," said Thorin. [Hobbit, p. 37]

Later in the book, during the Battle of the Five Armies, that goblin Azog does not lead the fight, but his son Bolg does [Hobbit, p. 265]. Both characters seem to be very different in the movies: Azog is not killed in Moria, but it is unknown as of yet whether he will lead the attack on Erebor in the third movie or Bolg will. Bolg for now is a torturer in Dol Guldur [LoTRWiki].

2. On the trip to Rivendell, the meeting with the Three Trolls has been nicely done. But then the party meets Radagast who does not appear in the original tale. He tells of a growing darkness in the abandoned fortress of Dol Guldur (southern Mirkwood) and the entire changing of the forest to evil. He also tells of fighting the witch king of Angmar and seeing a necromancer.
3. Before Rivendell is reached, the party is attacked by the Azog and his gang, not only creating a chasing scene with dwarves having to run fast, but also the loss of the party's ponies, and a secret canyon passage to the valley of the Last Homely House. This comes by surprise; in the book, the ponies are not lost before Goblin-town in the mountains.
4. Having arrived at Rivendell, in the film the dwarves openly display the grudge they have with elves in general. Although, following the prologue, they should only have a grudge with Thranduil's people (the woodelves of Mirkwood) for they didn't assist in defending Erebor against the descending Smaug. This grudge also makes them leave after one night (without Gandalf,

who follows later); the whole scene is placed in late summer or beginning of autumn.

The book is completely different. There, the party spends a long time in Rivendell (about two weeks, during summer solstice). During midsummer's night the map is deciphered (and thus having a fixed date for the moon runes on the map). At midsummer's morning the whole party leaves on their ponies.

5. In the movie, there is another addition to the Rivendell setting: a meeting of Saruman, Galadriel (who both do not appear in the book), Gandalf and Elrond during which the developments in Dol Guldur are discussed.
6. The next stop on the trip is Goblin-town, which is again quite close to the book, although action scenes have been added to the film; but these scenes do not alter the look-and-feel and overall intent of the story. The same goes for the Riddles in the Dark, that are quite close to the original. Bilbo's escape through Goblin "gate" (in the film, that is only a small gap in the mountains) is told a little differently (and Bilbo loses his vest buttons at a different location), the overall feeling of the scene is kept and i. e. still includes Bilbo invisibly leaping over Gollum's head.

Then things drastically change: while the party reaches the Anduin valley in the book, and is attacked by wargs on a clearing (and the wargs are much later joined by the goblins from Goblin-town), the movie tells the story differently: Azog and his warriors attack the dwarf party, riding on wargs. The whole scene is placed on a cliff high in the mountains; this of course adds to the thrill of the eagle rescue. At the end of the movie, the eagle eyrie and the view to Erebor are a quite rewarding.

## **2 Explanation Attempt**

These changes and additions are very interesting and are Jackson's attempt to include other aspects of Middle-Earth history into the movie. Maybe the decision of including all that is the reason for producing three films (although at first, only two were planned).

"The Hobbit" takes place in the year 2941 (Third Age of Middle-Earth). Regarding the book, the story starts on April 25th, when Gandalf first comes to Bag End, at April 27th Thorin and Company ride out of Hobbiton. They reach the lonely mountain on October 12th; Bilbo leaves Erebor on November 27th and (after a long stay at

Beorn's house) reach Rivendell on May 1st, 2942 and is in the Shire again in June, 2942 [Atlas, pp. 98,99].

The Story of the years (and even Ages) before that time can be read in "The Tale of Years" or "The Silmarillion", and those give us a hint of things that were developing during the years around 2941.

When looking at "The Hobbit" (the book) itself, the only reason to think that something else goes on, is the abrupt departure of Gandalf when Thorin and Company were about to enter Mirkwood. To understand the tactical situation in Middle-Earth at that time and how this situation has been scripted into story changes in the movie, let us start at the beginning of the Third Age.

## **2.1 Historical Background**

Sauron was defeated, and when the One Ring was slewn of his finger, his spirit escaped the body and would not have been able to retake shape if the ring had been destroyed at that time. But it wasn't, and so his spirit tried for a long time to regain power (and a bodily form).

After 2000 years, he managed and partly manifested in Dol Guldur. But this was not known generally, for "though many deemed that it [the evil in Dol Guldur] was wrought by the Ring Wraiths" [Silmarillion, p. 360], who were situated in Minas Ithil (which they conquered in 2002 and thus renamed Minas Morgul). Only Gandalf was convinced that the "growing evil power in Dol Guldur was Sauron himself. In 2063" [Atlas, p. 60], Gandalf "went to Dol Guldur and the Sorcerer fled from him" [Silmarillion, p. 360] to the east. The long peace ended in 2460, when Sauron returned to Dol Guldur with allies. From that time forward, there were severe attacks on Gondor and others every few years right up to the time of "The Hobbit" [Atlas, see pp. 60-64].

During the time of Sauron's return to Dol Guldur around 2460, the White Council was founded, in which were Elrond, Galadriel, Cirdan (the shipwright, who runs the Grey Havens), Gandalf and Saruman, with the latter as their chief, "for he had most studied the devices of Sauron of old" [Silmarillion, p. 361]. Galadriel wanted Gandalf as chief, but he decided not to bind himself to that job.

As the power in Dol Guldur grew, Gandalf went there again in 2850 [UnfinishedTales, p. 415] and reported Sauron not only to have returned to that fortress but to be "gathering again all the Rings to his hand" [Silmarillion, p. 361]. During that time, the White Council was summoned, but Saruman always voted to wait and watch. This illogical behaviour is explained both in the Silmarillion and the Hunt for the Ring (Unfinished Tales) as to be a) greed to find the One Ring

for himself and b) jealousy of Gandalf of whom he knew to be the more powerful [UnfinishedTales, pp. 451-456].

In a parallel development, Thrain (I.), descendant from the family of Durin, established the Kingdom under the Mountain in 1999 (see: Appendix to "Return of the King" or [Atlas], p. 65). Thror, his eldest son, inherited the throne. Sauron gave to Thror the first-made of the seven Dwarf Rings (although already forged in 1500-1590 Second Age) and Thror used it to build the treasure of Erebor. Erebor was taken in 2770 by Smaug, and Thror, his son Thrain (II.) and his grandson Thorin (later called Thorin Oakenshield) escaped through the secret tunnel (the one from "The Hobbit").

Thror went to Moria after giving his Ring to Thrain, but was later "killed there by the orc Azog" [UnfinishedTales, p. 415]. This "led to the War of the Dwarves and the Orcs, which ended in the great Battle of Azanulbizar [...] in 2799" (ibid.).

Thrain and Thorin lived in the Ered Luin (the Blue Mountains, the large mountains west of the Shire) until in 2841 Thrain wanted to retake the Lonely Mountain, but was captured and imprisoned in Dol Guldur, where the ring was taken from him. When Gandalf entered there in 2850, he met Thrain (without knowing who he was) just before he died. Thrain gave to Gandalf the map and the key to Erebor but wasn't able to explain its purpose anymore [UnfinishedTales, p. 419, p. 435]. Obviously, Sauron had only looked for the last of the Seven Rings (the Dwarven Rings of Power) and had overlooked the map.

Gandalf carried map and key safe with himself, being sure that they would someday prove useful.

## **2.2 Events that Led to the Unexpected Party in Bag End**

With Sauron's power growing, Gandalf was afraid that he might attack both Lorien and Rivendell. This would have had devastating effects for the upcoming war; and also (much later) the Ringbearer would have had no safe haven on his trip to Mordor.

Also, Gandalf was afraid of Smaug, as the dragon could be used by Sauron as a disastrous weapon. The dragon in the Lonely Mountain was also in a strategically well placed position; with the orcs / goblins in Mount Gundabad and northern Misty Mountains, the evil creatures in Mirkwood and the Desolation of Smaug, the dwarves in the distant Iron Hills would be the only possible allies in the north for any upcoming war. As a result, Gandalf had two great issues: keeping Sauron busy to keep him from attacking Lorien and Rivendell, and getting rid of Smaug.

In March 2941, Gandalf was on his way to the Shire and met Thorin who was now the last heir to the Kingdom under the Mountain. He was living near Bree in exile, but still wanting to regain the treasures of Erebor and taking revenge on Smaug. Gandalf accompanied Thorin to the Ered Luin and discussed in length how such an undertaking could be made possible.

The problems were the following: as dragons are careful when it comes to their hoard, the dwarves would long have been smelt or heard long before they even reached the inner chamber in the heart of the Lonely Mountain. Gandalf knew that he had to bring someone silent and with a scent unknown to Smaug.

Also, an open attempt to reach the mountain would have gained Sauron's attention. As he would not have allowed any change to the situation in the north, the dwarves would have to go secretly.

When they passed through the Shire to the Blue Mountains, Gandalf suddenly realised that everything was falling into place: if he could convince the dwarves to bring a hobbit, the problem of approaching Smaug would at least have a chance of succeeding. Still, it did not solve the problem of getting entirely rid of the dragon, but at least offered a chance to get a look at the dragon and his treasure. Gandalf would then have to convince the White Council to attack Dol Guldur (to keep Sauron busy) and the whole undertaking would suddenly become possible.

The dwarves weren't eager to go in secret and even less happy to bring a halfling. They could be convinced both by the map and key, and because they made Gandalf say that the hobbit was a professional burglar.

Gandalf hadn't yet spoken to Bilbo but he knew him from 2921 (when he was last in the Shire) to be a possible candidate. This was a very critical aspect to Gandalf's plan, Bilbo could have become settled so much that he simply refused to go; in that case, the entire plan would have collapsed.

The whole conversation between Gandalf and the dwarves in the Ered Luin is available in the *Unfinished Tales*, pp. 415-435.

And so it came to pass that Gandalf invited all thirteen dwarves for April 26th to a house in Hobbiton with a burglar sign at the door (which he himself put there, after checking on Bilbo on April 25th).

### **2.3 Explanation attempts**

1. Orcs or Goblins? In the book it's Goblins. It is not clear why there had to be a change to orcs, it could be for several reasons: The most plausible one is that the film had to look more like the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy in which no goblins appear. Another

reason is that in Tolkien's works the two terms are sometimes used synonymously (see "The Book of Lost Tales" and there the "Tale of Turambar"). Also, Thorin's sword is called "Orcrest, the Goblin-cleaver" [Hobbit, p. 61]. Wikipedia offers a discussion on the terms orcs, goblins and uruks [Wikipedia]. In the prologue to the "Lord of the Rings", the summary of Bilbo's adventures speaks of orcs [Fellowship, p. 14-17].

Nevertheless, in everyday's understanding of the terms orc and goblin, one expects goblins to be smaller and differently looking, while orcs have green skin and can have large teeth. This differentiation of the two is clearly shown in the film, where in Goblin-town seemed to be goblins in all shapes and sizes, looking distinctly different from the orcs outside, so if goblins and orcs really are synonyms and that being the reason for making Azog an orc, the design of the goblins is inconsequential.

The reason for having Azog become a main character on the other hand is probably to have a major story arc throughout all three movies and creating a perpetual foe. Having him riding wargs is also consistent with the showing of orcs in the "Lord of the Rings" movies and makes him a flexible and fast enemy. The great battle in the flashback (where he is introduced) seems to be the battle at Azanulbizar (Moria Gate), and the slaying of Thrór is fused with the battle (although it should have happened before, see above).

But then, there is also Bolg, having a completely different job. As it is of yet unclear whether Azog will be killed during the movies or Bolg will stay in Dol Guldur as evil handyman to the necromancer; as such it is also unclear who will lead the attack on Erebor.

2. The meeting with Radagast cannot be put in proper historic context. It is known that Radagast - as being able to talk to all kinds of animals - supplied Saruman with spy animals (mostly birds) and that he dwelled in Greenwood (Mirkwood). The meeting referred to in the film can only be the meeting that took place before the White Council in 2851. It is unclear that Radagast ever went to Dol Guldur, but in 2850 Gandalf went there (see above). It seems the story has been bent here and events that took place 90 years before "The Hobbit" have been brought into the movie.
3. An addition to the film is the chasing of the dwarves by Azog before reaching Rivendell. As said above, this could be a result of making the Azog character a major foe and to emphasize

on the threat from Mount Gundabad, as is discussed later in Rivendell ("orcs from the north").

4. Having reached Rivendell, the dwarves display a great distrust or grudge towards the elves in the movie. This shall refer to the prologue, where Thranduil (the king of the wood-elves from Mirkwood) turns away from Erebor when the dwarves fight the dragon. Somehow this happens in the book aswell: "Dwarves don't get on well with them. Even decent enough dwarves like Thorin and his friends think them foolish [...] or get annoyed with them" [Hobbit, p. 59]. But later in the book it is said that "they stayed long in that good house, fourteen days at least, and they found it hard to leave" [Hobbit, p. 60].

The movie version creates another inconsistency: why would Bilbo want to return there in the end of his days, because him loving the place is not shown. Here, the extended cut (to be published on DVD/Bluray) might help.

5. The White Council meeting at Rivendell in the movie can only be a reference to the Council meeting of 2851 because of several aspects: the people attending, the place of the meeting, Gandalf meeting Radagast beforehand, Radagast's trip to Dol Guldur and Gandalf clearly knowing about Sauron in Dol Guldur. In the original literature, the Council meeting of 2851 is also described as the meeting where Gandalf urged an attack on Dol Guldur, while Saruman voted against that [UnfinishedTales, p. 454,455]; this concurs with the scenes in the movie.

On the other hand, the meeting of the council in August 2941 (the reason for Gandalf to leave Thorin and Company before they entered Mirkwood) is expected to have agreed on an attack of Dol Guldur (which is not explicitly stated in the Unfinished Tales but in the The Fellowship of The Ring ("... the evil power in Mirkwood had been driven out by the White Council...") [Fellowship, p. 57]). This probably is the only reason why Sauron's forces did not intervene during the Battle of the Five Armies at Erebor. In the movie, it is already late summer (August?) when the party reaches Rivendell, which could lead to the conclusion that those two council meetings have been fused to create a hybrid story element in the film.

In the movie there are some other aspects to the council meeting that are close to the statements in the Unfinished Tales: Galadriel has a trustful and close relationship to Gandalf and speaks to him after the council. There it becomes obvious that

she wants him as main decision maker, and also it is shown that Gandalf is afraid his complex planning may not work out.

6. The last alteration in the movie is final battle between the party and Azog's gang. In the author's opinion, it will have to be seen if the character of Azog is just a small addition to the first movie or will become a continuous threat throughout the entire storyline.

### 3 Conclusion

When reading or watching "The Hobbit", one should not forget that this tale is a story of lucky coincidences and as such cannot reach the psychological depth of other fantasy literature. It is even often referred to as a children's story or fairy-tale. Nevertheless, Middle-Earth at the end of the Third Age offers a complex setting when all aspects and secondary tales are included. Keeping this in mind, it still can make the reader feel positively about it, because it clearly shows that no matter what, evil forces make errors, and that is a good thing.

In this regard, the whole story of the Ring Wars could only happen the way it did because

- Sauron overlooks the map and key of Thrain.
- Sauron was busy with an attack *from* Lorien, in which he flees and does not intervene at Erebor.
- The One Ring is found by Bilbo, but no one knew that for a long time except Gollum. Gollum wasn't captured by Sauron until much later (and only then Sauron learned of the Shire and send the Dark Riders to find it).
- Without the Ring, Bilbo wouldn't have survived and couldn't have helped so much (i. e. the escape from Goblin-town, the Spiders, Thranduils halls, and his deeds at Erebor).
- After Erebor was recaptured, the north became quite the safe place that would not help Sauron: Erebor had an alliance with the dwarves from the Iron Hills, Dale was rebuilt, northern Mirkwood and the mountains around Gundabad were nearly free of orcs/goblins, Thranduil was controlling northern Mirkwood, Smaug was dead and could not be used by Sauron.

It remains to be seen how much of the book and the secondary literature will be used in the films to fully show the entire setting.

As the first part already takes enough time for the important scenes (i. e. Gollum's cave) and the decision has been made to produce three films, the level of expectation will be quite high on this Third Age hybrid setting.

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