

Bilbo the hobbit meets Smaug



J. R. R. Tolkien studied at Oxford and was always fascinated by languages. *The Hobbit*, his first novel, is based on a bedtime story that he made up for his children and illustrated with his own drawings. In this story, Bilbo Baggins the hobbit is sent on a mission to help Thorin Oakenshield to recover his homeland, the Lonely Mountain, and the treasures stolen by the dragon Smaug.

5 ... it was now undoubtedly hot in the tunnel. Wisps of vapour floated up and past him and he began to sweat. A sound, too, began to throb in his ears, a sort of bubbling like the noise of a large pot galloping on the fire, mixed with a rumble as of a gigantic tom-cat purring. This grew to the unmistakable gurgling noise of some vast animal snoring in its sleep down there in the red glow in front of him.

10 It was at this point that Bilbo stopped. Going on from there was the bravest thing he ever did. The tremendous things that happened afterwards were as nothing compared to it. He fought the real battle in the tunnel alone, before he ever saw the vast danger that lay in wait. At any rate after a short halt go on he did; and you can picture him coming to the end of the tunnel, an opening of much the same size and shape as the door above. Through it peeps the hobbit's little head. Before him lies the great bottommost cellar or dungeon-hall of the ancient dwarfs right at the Mountain's root. It is almost dark so that its vastness can only be dimly guessed, but rising from the near side of the rocky floor there is a great glow.
15 The glow of Smaug!

20 There he lay, a vast red-golden dragon, fast asleep; a thrumming came from his jaws and nostrils, and wisps of smoke, but his fires were low in slumber. Beneath him, under all his limbs and his huge coiled tail, and about him on all sides stretching away across the unseen floors, lay countless piles of precious things, gold wrought and unwrought, gems and jewels, and silver red-stained in the ruddy light.

25 Smaug lay, with wings folded like an immeasurable bat, turned partly on one side, so that the hobbit could see his underparts and his long pale belly crusted with gems and fragments of gold from his long lying on his costly bed. Behind him where the walls were nearest could dimly be seen coats of mail, helms and axes, swords and spears hanging; and there in rows stood great jars and vessels filled with a wealth that could not be guessed.

From *The Hobbit*
J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973)

- 1 Which senses are triggered in Bilbo in the opening paragraph?

- 2 What two animals do you think of when you read about the strange sound described in the second full sentence (lines 2–4)?

- 3 The author says of the hobbit, 'He fought the real battle in the tunnel alone' (line 8).
 - a) What is the danger that lies ahead?

 - b) What is Bilbo trying to overcome in that 'real battle'?

- 4 Which word tells us that the room he enters is the very deepest under the mountain?

- 5 What is the dragon's name? _____
- 6 What is 'ruddy light' like? _____
- 7
 - a) What are stuck to the dragon's belly?

 - b) How do you think they had got there?

- 8 Apart from the dragon, what does Bilbo see that might add to his feelings of imminent danger?

- 9 How does 'wrought' gold differ from 'unwrought' gold?

1 mark

2 marks

1 mark

1 mark

1 mark

1 mark

1 mark

1 mark

1 mark

1 mark

1 mark