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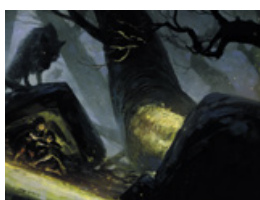
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Dearest Balin,

almost six years have passed already since the last time you were here. I remember very well everything you and Gandalf said when we met. You were alarmed, and I took your warnings to heart, but I don't think you would find it surprising to know that news of a nameless threat is hard to believe here in the dear old Shire. Gandalf came to see me again, on several occasions. He seems to care about our friendship, and he says I should indeed be worried, but his vague words of warning make even less of a dent in the general sense of peace and protection that we enjoy here, away in the north-west.

But don't think that I am completely clueless! all I need to do is have a look at... the things I collected in my adventures to remember that there is a wide and dangerous world out there. Sometimes I even miss it, the road, the thrill, the narrow escapes. It's my Tookish side. But then I look at my beautiful garden, my snapdragons and sunflowers, my trailing nasturtians... how they glow, red and golden, more beautiful than any dragon-hoard that ever was, and I am back to being a Baggins.

I hope that what I say won't be too much of a disappointment to you. You haven't asked yet, but I know that you mean to invite me to join you in that Moria adventure you are always talking about. I am afraid that I have spent enough time crawling in the dark under the misty mountains not to wish to do that ever again! But there's a good bunch of eager lads and lasses here that you might find to your liking. Why, they are just waiting for no more than a nod in their direction from me or from our grey friend to go off into the blue on mad adventures! There is an age that is more appropriate to that type of business, believe me, and I have taught them a thing or two. I suspect that Gandalf has too...

from a letter from Bilbo Baggins,
Esq. to Balin son of Fundin.

PROLOGUE

“His sword, Sting, Bilbo hung over his fireplace, and his coat of marvellous mail, the gift of the Dwarves from the Dragon-hoard, he lent to a museum, to the Michel Delving Mathom-house in fact. But he kept in a drawer at Bag End the old cloak and hood that he had worn on his travels; and the ring, secured by a fine chain, remained in his pocket.”

For generations of fans, the Shire of the Hobbits has been the gateway to Middle-earth. Both the Quest for Erebor told in *The Hobbit* and that to Mount Doom described in *The Lord of the Rings* start here, with Bilbo and Frodo Baggins providing the readers with a first-person perspective — a point of view allowing them to unravel the complexity of the world of Arda step by step.

The Shire is a small world, almost fable-like, where a single Wild Wolf poses a serious threat, and a Wizard is maybe nothing more than an eccentric fireworks-maker.

In the same way, this volume describes the Shire as an introductory, less dangerous setting for new (and maybe younger) players of *The Lord of the Rings™ Roleplaying*. By using the material provided herein, the players will get a taste of the world of Middle-earth, going on adventures within limited boundaries. Once they familiarize themselves with the scope of the game, the players will be ready to venture across the vast expanses of Eriador and beyond.

The first section — *Regarding the Shire*, is a geographical compendium covering the four Farthings of the Shire, all the way from Greenholm in the west to Buckland and the Old Forest in the East.

The second section — *The Conspiracy of the Red Book*, presents five exciting adventures, particularly suited to those wishing to play as Hobbit adventurers.

Finally, the Appendix presents eight pre-generated characters, offering players the opportunity to take the mantle of some Hobbits whose children will go on to do extraordinary things, such as Drogo Baggins, Rory Brandibuck, and Esmeralda Took.

WEAPONS IN THE SHIRE

At no time had Hobbits of any kind been warlike, and they had never fought among themselves. In olden days they had, of course, been often obliged to fight to maintain themselves in a hard world; but in Bilbo's time that was very ancient history.

As a peaceful people for countless generations, very few (if any) Hobbits possess weapons of war, let alone forge or sell them. The only weapons available in the Shire are simple implements used mainly as tools, such as axes, clubs, hammers, hatchets, and staves. Daggers, being easily concealed, are considered too dangerous and therefore are not normally sold in stores, except in Buckland where longer hunting knives are commonly available. Bows and arrows are crafted, but are only issued to Bounders or stored in secret stashes in case they are needed one day, and they are not available for sale. Short swords, often nothing more than long daggers made by the Big Folk and given as gifts to the more adventurous Hobbits of yore, are regarded as mathoms and are only to be found on display in Michel Delving's Mathom-house, or as ornaments in the smials of a few Hobbit families of noble descent.

In any case, wandering around the Shire armed with anything other than a walking staff will surely arouse the attention of a Bounder or a Shirriff, who will question the unwary Hobbit about the weapon carried, going so far as to confiscate it.

Bounder

Small humanoid (Hobbit)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

ARMOUR CLASS 13 (leather shirt)

HIT POINTS 9 (2d6 + 2)

SPEED 25 ft.

SKILLS Perception +3, Stealth +4

SENSES passive Perception 13

LANGUAGES Westron

CHALLENGE 1/8 (25 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

HOBBIT-SENSE. The Bounder has advantage on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws against Shadow.

ACTIONS

STAFF. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage, or 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands.

BOW. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.



REGARDING
the shire

*“Forty leagues it stretched form the Far Downs
to the Brandywine Bridge, and fifty from the
northern moors to the marshes in the south.*

The Hobbits named it the Shire...”

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SHIRE

Thus began the Shire-reckoning, for the year of the crossing of the Brandywine (as the Hobbits turned the name) became Year One of the Shire, and all later dates were reckoned from it.

Though no one in the Shire recalls the time before they passed over the Bridge of Stonebows, Hobbits did not spring wholly into existence out of nothing. Ancient legends speak of a small, stout, river-folk that was driven out of the Anduin River valley and made their way west. There are suggestions that during their long, meandering journey, they spread into the North-realm of Men, perhaps making their way as far south as the region now known as Dunland. Tales forgotten by most and often considered unreliable claim that Hobbits once swore allegiance to that ancient North Kingdom, and took part on at least one occasion in feats of arms when evil things came out of dark places.

It was after taking up brief residence in the Chetwood and the area surrounding the village of Bree that a company of Hobbits petitioned the King of Men for a land of their own. They were granted his leave to occupy an area of verdant lands and build a realm for themselves that would ensure a bountiful life, hopefully free of danger and woe. Led by the brothers Marcho and Blanco, that company of Hobbits crossed the Brandywine, claiming as their own domain the land ranging from its banks to the Far Downs, some forty leagues west. They named that realm and all the surrounding land fifty leagues from north to south the Shire.

Originally ordered to maintain the great East-West Road and the Brandywine Bridge as a service to the King, the Shire-folk and their humble domain were soon left to their own devices. Even the title of Thain, granted to a single Hobbit of worth who spoke with the King's authority, rapidly became little more than an honorific among local residents. With the passing of only a handful of decades, few recognised the existence of the Shire to be of any importance. Few, except the Hobbits, of course. Free to tend to their own affairs, the denizens of the Shire prospered, and soon all the Hobbits of the wide world took up residence within its borders (save for those few still making their home in and around Bree).

This first generation of Shire-folk would suffer greatly at the hands of the Great Plague less than forty years after the foundation of the Shire (S.R. 36)*, but though the terrible sickness caused the death of innumerable Hobbits and Men alike, the resilience of the Shire proved to be greater than that of the North Kingdom.

The days of the King were finally over in the year 375. The Shire became truly independent, though it mattered little to the world beyond its borders (save as a curiosity to the most inquisitive). Severed from larger history, Hobbits continued their lives in peace and plenty for countless generations. Villages and communities seemed to flourish endlessly, their precise dates of appearance largely unrecorded in any local chronology.

It is indeed due only to gossip and family history that we know that the Oldbucks, who could trace their lineage back to Bucca of the Marish, first Thain of the Shire, were so bold as to cross the Brandywine River going east and establish the community of Buckland, now home to Brandy Hall and the great Brandybuck family. It was Brandy Hall's founder Gorchendad Oldbuck who changed his family name to Brandybuck, in honour of his new community in the same year of its founding, S.R. 740.

It was during this same period of prosperity that Tobold Hornblower would learn the art of the cultivation and smoking of pipe-weed, an enduring art that remains almost unique to the people of the Shire even unto this day. Isengrim Took II would begin construction of the Great Smials in Tuckborough in 1083, which still stands as the ancestral home of the Took family. It is also likely that in this time the Messenger Service (and later the Quick Post) were established to carry news between the ever-growing number of communities.

* To those outside the Shire their method of reckoning the passage of time may seem odd or even out of touch with the rest of Middle-earth. Quite so. Hobbits do not concern themselves with the affairs of Men or Elves, and it was in the 1601st year of the Third Age that they began living according to their own calendar. As such, outsiders can simply add 1600 to the Shire Reckoning year to get its equivalent in the Third Age. —G

No Hobbit knows what prompted Golfimbul and his Goblin horde to descend from Mount Gram and cross the borders of the North Farthing. Instead, everyone from Michel Delving to Buckland knows that it was Bandobras "Bullroarer" Took of Long-Cleeve who led the Hobbity-in-arms against the foul invader in the spring of the year 1147. Standing well over four feet tall and capable of riding a full-grown horse, Bullroarer Took charged screaming across the Greenfields and straight into the Goblin lines. With a single swing of his mighty club, he knocked the goblin warlord's head right off his shoulders. The head is said to have sailed straight over the entire enemy army, eventually landing in a rabbit hole. So terrifying was this sight that the entire invading force fled. Oh, and the game of golf was invented in that very moment as well.

But the history of the Shire is not without its less violent troubles, and the first real threat to its existence came not from Goblins, but from famine. The winter of 1158 saw the beginning of the Long Winter. The ground froze hard and cold, with ice that came in the early days of November and did not leave until the last days of spring. Crops were destroyed by frost, and the delay in the turning of the season left planting to be done late, if indeed it could be done at all. The Days of Dearth that followed

claimed the lives of many Hobbits for a full year, and it was long before joy and celebration returned to the Four Farthings. But perhaps it was this difficult time that reminded Hobbits that they were of hardy stock and strong hearts — for they endured.

Minor horrors continued to plague the Shire, culminating in another terrible cold spell, known now as the Fell Winter of 1311. It was during this brutal season that the Brandywine River froze over, and that dire White Wolves came down out of the north and crossed into the Eastfarthing. On that terrible night the Horn-call of Buckland was sounded, and for the first time in almost two centuries, Hobbits took up arms to defend their own lands from invaders. Though victorious, the losses of that battle were grievous, and combined with the famine from an absent growing season, the people of the Shire suffered many deaths. But hope often comes when unlooked for, and it was in that time that Gandalf, the Grey Wizard, came to the aid of many. It is believed by some that this kindness may have saved the Shire all together, though few Hobbits living now would make such a claim, considering that Gandalf is now seen as quite the disturber of the peace (stories also abound concerning how Gandalf was helped by a group of Men, who returned to the wilds when their task was completed).



THE ART OF SMOKING

The habit to smoke the herb known as pipe-weed or leaf using pipes of wood or clay is a peculiar art that is almost certainly the invention of Hobbits. Adopted in recent times by travelling Dwarves and wandering Wizards, it is very popular among the inhabitants of Bree. Indeed, the idea to put the leaf into pipes for smoking can almost certainly be attributed to Bree-Hobbits.

The true mastery of that art began over two hundred years ago when Tobold Hornblower of Longbottom grew, dried, and smoked his first crop of Longbottom Leaf. Even to this day, though other flora can be smoked, no Hobbit, nor Dwarf, nor Man can argue that Longbottom is not the finest smoke in Middle-earth.

It is likely that Tobold, being rarely one to travel, brought the practice back into the Shire after one of his rare trips to Bree, though he never gave details as to what possessed him to bring the plant to the Southfarthing and cultivate it on the farmland he had claimed as his own. Though the details of its arrival will remain forever a mystery, Tobold was determined to grow this wonderful herb, and within a few generations it was found in the many variants now known to flourish throughout Longbottom and across the Shire.

Pipe-craft, like the art of smoking, is a matter of pride for many Hobbits of Longbottom and the Southfarthing,

and their products range from stubby clay pipes smoked by simple farmers to ornate and intricately carved wooden pipes that are the treasured heirlooms of many of the wealthy families across the Shire. Indeed, it is not uncommon for several Hobbits to get together and engage in impromptu contests seeing who can blow the biggest smoke ring from one of these grand creations.

BLOWING SMOKE RINGS

Those who find themselves drawn into a smoke ring blowing contest (which most often occur inside inns or on summer nights in the Southfarthing), make either an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma check, contested by the adversary's Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma check (each participant chooses the ability to use). Proficiency with pipes allows a contestant to add its proficiency bonus to the check. The character that wins the contest is declared the winner, and ties are common, as Hobbits dispute the quality of one ring or another in the seconds before it disperses. Tradition holds that the winner gives as a gift to those who have lost a pouch of their finest tobacco, so that they might further study the art. However, the winner is still kept in high regard, and can expect a filled tankard and a free meal at the losers' table within the next few days.

In the decades following those dark days, peace and comfort became once again the rule in the Shire. The largest trouble to strike this green country in recent years was the disappearance and surprising return of Bilbo Baggins, of Bag End. Once a respectable Hobbit, he went off on some adventure with a troupe of Dwarves and the mischievous Wizard Gandalf, only to return, nearly two decades ago now, astride a pony laden with riches, according to rumour. Since that day, Bilbo was officially considered 'cracked', and all sorts of trouble was attributed to him: Dwarves started to be seen more often on the great East-West Road, and strange, hooded wanderers were sighted by more than one bounder. And wouldn't you know it — since then that trouble maker Gandalf seems to appear and disappear about the Shire whenever he pleases! No doubt coaxing tweens and Tooks alike into all manner of adventure as he did that poor, mad Baggins of Bag End.



THE TALE OF YEARS OF THE SHIRE

Described below in brief are important events in the history of the Shire, notating both the dates as they are recounted in the calendar of the Shire Reckoning and the years of the Third Age as recognised by those outside its borders.

- ◆ **1 S.R. / 1601 T.A.** — Marcho and Blanco establish the Shire in the lands between the Far Downs and the Brandywine River, with the blessing of the King of the North Kingdom.
- ◆ **36 S.R. / 1636 T.A.** — The Great Plague sweeps across the Shire and many Hobbits die of the pestilence.
- ◆ **375 S.R. / 1975 T.A.** — A company of Hobbit archers travels to aid the King. They never return. With the fall of the North Kingdom the Shire effectively becomes an independent realm.
- ◆ **740 S.R. / 2340 T.A.** — Gorhendad Oldbuck abdicates the Thainship of the Shire and travels east to establish a new settlement on the far banks of the Brandywine River, where he takes the family name of Brandybuck and begins construction of Brandy Hall.
- ◆ **1070 S.R. / 2670 T.A.** — Tobold Hornblower cultivates the first recorded crop of pipe-weed.
- ◆ **1083 S.R. / 2683 T.A.** — Isengrim Took II begins excavating the Great Smials, ancestral home of the Took family.
- ◆ **1147 S.R. / 2747 T.A.** — The Battle of the Greenfields. Bandobras "Bullroarer" Took defeats the Goblin horde of Golfinbul and routs his invading army that had come down from Mount Gram.
- ◆ **1158–1160 S.R. / 2758–2760 T.A.** — The Long Winter. A brutal winter destroys crops, and snow covers the Shire from November through March. The famine, sickness, and death that follow for over a year become known as the Days of Dearth.
- ◆ **1311–1312 S.R. / 2911–2912 T.A.** — The Fell Winter. A long, hard winter freezes the Brandywine River solid. White wolves cross its waters and are driven back by Hobbit defenders after the Horn-call of Buckland is sounded. Famine again briefly grips the Shire through the season, and into the spring. Gandalf the Grey comes to the aid of the Hobbits, and saves many lives with the help of mysterious wanderers.
- ◆ **1341 S.R. / 2941 T.A.** — Bilbo Baggins of Bag End departs the Shire in the company of Gandalf the Grey and thirteen Dwarves.
- ◆ **1342 S.R. / 2942 T.A.** — Bilbo Baggins returns from his travels in foreign parts, proves he is very much alive, and reclaims ownership of his home as it is being auctioned on the presumption of his death. He retires, becoming a local oddity, and living off the wealth he acquired in far off lands.
- ◆ **1357 S.R. / 2957 T.A.** — Cotman Bunce resigns. Pott Whitfoot elected Mayor of Michel Delving.
- ◆ **1360 S.R. / 2960 T.A.** — Current year.

THE HOBBITRY-IN-ARMS

Among the notable organisations established within the Shire are its oft-forgotten martial institutions. The first of these is the Hobbitry-in-arms, which acts as a militia to defend the Shire in times of dire need. It exists now as little more than a ceremonial company overseen by the Thain, who serves as its captain.

As to day-to-day matters, these are instead tended to by the Watch. The Watch consists of twelve Shirriffs, with three assigned to each of the four farthings, and by a variable number of Bounders. Shirriffs are easily identifiable by the single feather in their cap, and are led by the First Shirriff — an honorific bestowed upon the Mayor of Michel Delving. But little trouble occurs within the borders of the Shire, and like the Hobbitry-in-arms, being a Shirriff is little more than a ceremonial position in all but the darkest of times. The most numerous element

of the Watch, and by far the busiest, is the Bounders, tasked with 'beating the bounds' — that is, seeing that outsiders and mischief makers don't cross into the Shire. Tasked with reporting any trouble they encounter to the Shirriffs, what they do is little more than nosing about the Shire, dipping into local inns to catch up on the most recent gossip, chasing naughty Hobbit children from a farmer's crop, or helping retrieve the occasional wayward cat from a tree.

In recent years, as Dwarves and other travellers have begun to enter the Shire more and more, the job of the Bounders has become a little livelier, much to their consternation. Some blame the coming of the Wizard Gandalf, while more than a few consider Bilbo Baggins to be responsible for bringing ill-fortune to the Shire, along with his piles of gold and jewels that he has stuffed away in Bag End.