

The Art of
THE HOBBIT

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Introduction

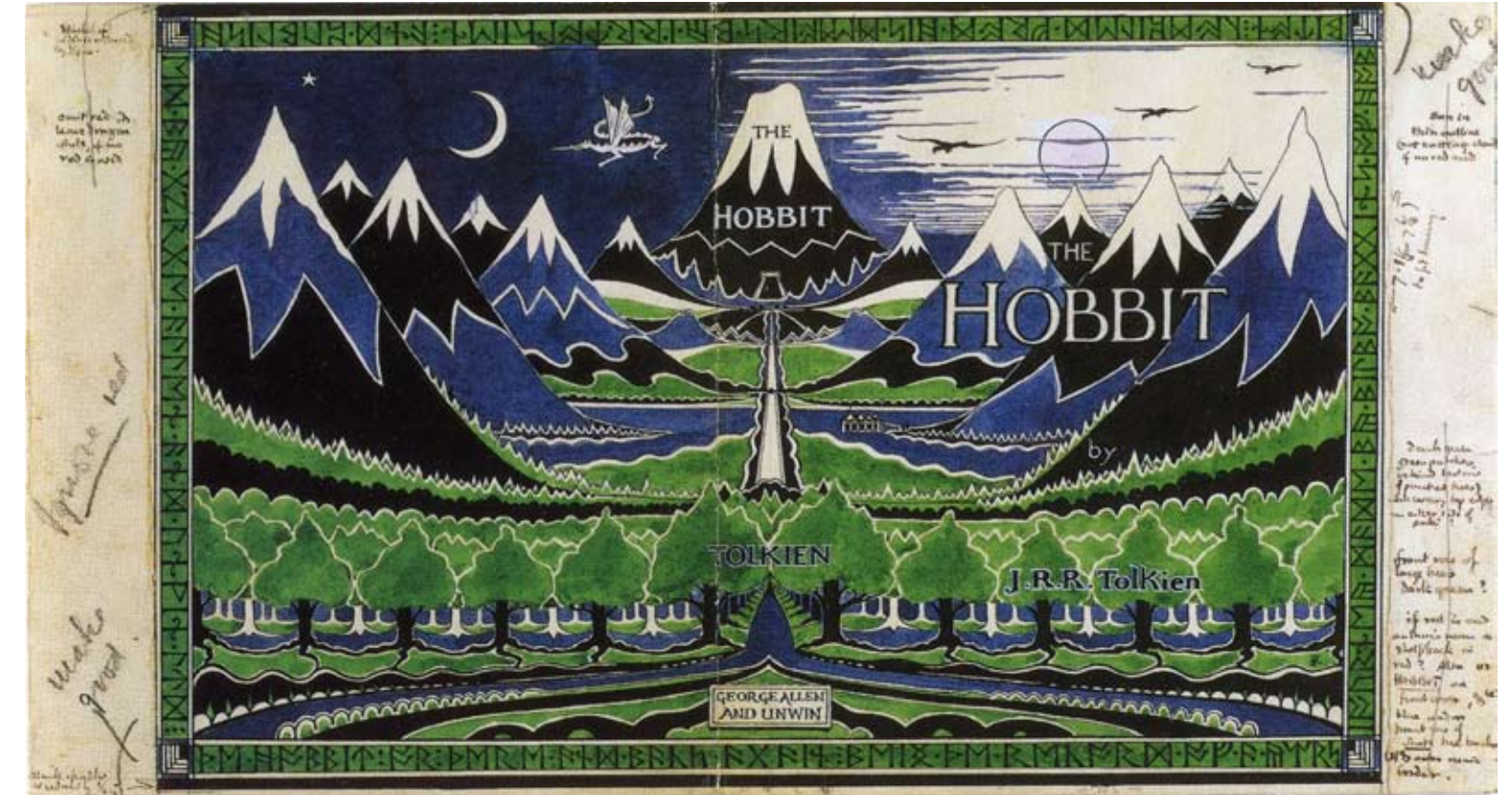
This book, with the help of maps, does not need any illustrations it is good and should appeal to all children between the ages of 5 and 9.

THE BOOK in question was *The Hobbit*, and the judgement was by Rayner Unwin, the ten-year-old son of Stanley Unwin, who was considering Tolkien's story for publication. In 1936, at his father's request, Rayner read *The Hobbit* in typescript and returned an enthusiastic report. For this he was paid a shilling – the best shilling George Allen & Unwin ever spent, Rayner would later say, since it led to the publication of one of the firm's most successful books, and in turn to an enormously popular sequel, *The Lord of the Rings*.

Rayner's comment that *The Hobbit* should include maps may have been suggested by the presence with the typescript of one of those Tolkien had drawn to accompany his story; or it may already have been agreed between Tolkien and Allen & Unwin that maps would be needed, as aids to the reader, should *The Hobbit* be published. But Rayner's view that the work did not need illustrations – a nod, maybe, to the publisher's perennial desire to control costs – ultimately was not shared by its author. For even though *The Hobbit* had been submitted originally with only one picture (probably a version of *Thror's Map*, which is mentioned in the text), it was a more fully illustrated book as it was read by (or to) family and friends, and Tolkien wished it to remain so when it was issued to a wider audience.

Dust-jackets

MOST OF THE several dummy dust-jackets Tolkien made for *The Hobbit* have been lost, and the one that survives is only a fragment, preserved by mounting it on Japanese paper. This may be one of the earliest of the jacket designs, as it seems never to have had the runic border present in the version Tolkien first sent to Allen & Unwin and which was used in the final art. Tolkien admitted that the first submitted sketch had too many colours, including two reds and two greens, and needed to be simplified and improved. At last, he reduced the number of colours to black, green, and blue along with the white of the paper. He would have liked some of its elements, such as the sun and flying dragon, to be printed in red, but an additional colour was considered too costly. (Red, however, has been added to some later editions of *The Hobbit*.) In a letter to Allen & Unwin, Tolkien wrote that ‘the presence of the sun and moon in the sky together refers to the magic attaching to the door’ in the Lonely Mountain, at the centre of the design – that is, according to the hidden message on *Thror’s Map*. The border of Anglo-Saxon runes on the final dust-jacket reads: THE HOBBIT OR THERE AND BACK AGAIN BEING THE RECORD OF A YEARS JOURNEY MADE BY BILBO BAGGINS OF HOBBITON COMPILED FROM HIS MEMOIRS BY J.R.R. TOLKIEN AND PUBLISHED BY GEORGE ALLEN AND UNWIN LTD. Although its lettering has since been revised by other hands, Tolkien’s dust-jacket for *The Hobbit* endures as one of the most successful and inviting examples of British book cover art.



Dust-jacket for *The Hobbit*, final art with Tolkien’s manuscript notes for the printer