

Book II, Chapter 6 – *On the Road* (1957) by Jack Kerouac

Sal and his friends can never stay in the same place for too long. This time, they have decided to leave the East Coast to go west once again, but first to New Orleans.

It was **drizzling** and mysterious at the beginning of our journey. I could see that it was all going to be one big saga of the **mist**. “Whooe!” yelled Dean. “Here we go!” And he **hunched over** the wheel and **gunned** her; he was back in his element, everybody could see that. We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving
5 confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, *move*.

And we moved! We flashed past the mysterious white signs in the night somewhere in New Jersey that say SOUTH (with an arrow) and WEST (with an arrow) and took the south one. New Orleans! It burned in our brains. From the dirty snows
10 of “frosty fagtown New York,” as Dean called it, all the way to the greeneries and river smells of old New Orleans at the **washed-out bottom** of America; then west. Ed was in the back seat; Marylou and Dean and I sat in front and had the warmest talk about the goodness and joy of life. Dean suddenly became tender. “Now dammit, look here, all of you, we all must admit that everything is fine and there’s
15 no need in the world to worry, and in fact we should realize what it would mean to us to UNDERSTAND that we’re not REALLY worried about ANYTHING. Am I right?” We all agreed. “Here we go, we’re all together... What did we do in New York? Let’s forgive.” We all had our **spats** back there. “That’s behind us, merely by miles and inclinations. Now we’re heading down to New Orleans to dig Old Bull
20 Lee and ain’t that going to **be kicks** and listen will you to this old tenorman **blow his top**”-he shot up the radio volume till the car **shuddered**”-and listen to him tell the story and put down true relaxation and knowledge.”

We all jumped to the music and agreed. The purity of the road. The white line in the middle of the highway unrolled and hugged our left front tire as if glued to
25 our groove. Dean hunched his muscular neck, T-shirted in the winter night, and **blasted the car** along. He insisted I drive through Baltimore for traffic practice; that was all right, except he and Marylou insisted on steering while they kissed and fooled around. It was crazy; the radio was on full blast. Dean beat drums on the dashboard till a great **sag** developed in it; I did too. The poor Hudson-the slow
30 boat to China-was receiving her beating.

“Oh man, what kicks!” yelled Dean. “Now Marylou, listen really, honey, you know that I’m hotrock capable of everything at the same time and I have unlimited energy-
now in San Francisco we must go on living together. I know just the place for you-at the end of the regular chain-gang run-I’ll be home just **a cut-hair less** than every
35 two days and for twelve hours at a stretch, and man, you know what we can do in twelve hours, darling. Meanwhile I’ll go right on living at Camille’s like nothin, see, she won’t know. We can work it, we’ve done it before.” It was all right with Marylou, she was really out for Camille’s scalp. The understanding had been that Marylou

40 would switch to me in Frisco, but I now began to see they were going to stick and I was going to be left alone on my butt at the other end of the continent. But why think about that when all the golden land's ahead of you and all kinds of **unforeseen** events wait **lurking** to surprise you and make you glad you're alive to see?

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VOCABULARY

drizzle: *bruiner*

mist: *brume*

hunch over: *(ici) se coucher sur*

gun (a car): *écraser le champignon'*

washed-out bottoms: *confins délavés*

spat: *querelle*

'be kicks': *être formidable*

blow his top: *crever le plafond*

shudder: *vibrer*

blast the car: *faire hurler le moteur*

sag: *renforcement*

a cut-hair less: *à un poil près*

unforeseen: *imprévu*

wait lurking: *attendre tapi dans l'ombre*

FOCUS ON

1. Who are the characters present in this excerpt? What are they doing?
2. What is the atmosphere in the car? How is this departure seen by the group?
3. (ll.8-10) "From the . . . west." How are the places described? Is one better than the other? Justify.
4. Describe what the characters worship above all. Find at least one sentence to justify your point.
5. Focusing on punctuation, typography, syntax and the choice of words, show how exaggeration is conveyed throughout the text.
6. Focus on the last paragraph.
 - What is Dean explaining to Marylou? Is it what the narrator expected?
 - What is the narrator's reaction?

Conclude:

7. To what extent would you say that this excerpt is a good illustration of the Beat Generation?

BRANCHING OUT

1. Discovering literary criticism.

"It's true that the Beat writers were caricatured and abused. [...] It's possible that something about the Beats simply made people uncomfortable. For the nineteen-fifties images of the Beat—Partisan Review's bohemian nihilist and Hollywood's hip hedonist—are almost complete inversions of the character types represented in "On the Road." The book is not about hipsters looking for kicks, or about subversives and nonconformists, rebels without a cause who point the way for the radicals of the nineteen-sixties. And the book is not an anti-intellectual celebration of spontaneity or an artifact of literary primitivism. It's a sad and somewhat self-consciously lyrical story about loneliness, insecurity, and failure. It's also a story about guys who want to be with other guys."

Louis Menand, "Drive, He Wrote: What the Beats Were About," in *The New Yorker*, 2007

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Match the races of Tolkien's Middle Earth to their definitions.

Humans	a.	1.	They are beautiful, extremely educated, strong and courageous. They are immortal unless killed in combat. They live in communion with nature.
Wizards	b.	2.	They are mortal, not necessarily well educated, and very different from one another. While some are courageous, strong and honorable, others can be arrogant or cowards.
Dwarves	c.	3.	They are rather short, usually keep to themselves and like living quietly in their homes, enjoying the day-to-day routine of an uneventful life.
Elves	d.	4.	In Tolkien's books, they are short people who like living in caves deep inside mountains. They are courageous, defend their honor and like gold above all.
Hobbits	e.	5.	They are of average height, or slightly taller, extremely powerful both physically and mentally. They use magic.

2. Among these types of characters, which ones are the most likely to bring heroes to the world. Find elements to justify your answer.
3. Imagine what kind of enemies they might have to face. Describe a few of them briefly.



To understand this extract, you need to take into account the following background

Background

Although J.R.R Tolkien probably started to make up the story of *The Hobbit* in order to entertain his four children, he had already imagined some of the world in which he set his fantasy beforehand. This book is probably one of the last novels from the coming-of-age of children's literature (1863-1945). During this period, a large number of the characters who were created have come to be part of the common world of childhood.

However, one has to admit that *The Hobbit* and more importantly its sequel *The Lord of the Rings* are far from being only considered children's literature. Indeed, the latter is considered Tolkien's masterpiece and a model of modern heroic epic*.



John Ronald Reuel TOLKIEN (1892-1973) was an English writer and scholar. He spent his life studying and teaching the English language and literature in English. He specialized in Old and Middle English. He became famous with the publication of his **fantasy*** novels *The Hobbit* (1937) and subsequently *The Lord of the Rings* (1955).

Chapter 8: Flies and Spiders – *The Hobbit* (1937)

by J.R.R. Tolkien

On their way to steal the treasure of a dragon, Bilbo and the dwarves go through a dark forest filled with magic. One evening, they are drawn to a place where they believe elves will be able to help them survive, but they only find themselves lost in the dark, and Bilbo ends up alone, not knowing where his friends have gone.

That was one of his most miserable moments. But he soon made up his mind that it was no good trying to do anything till day came with some little light, and quite useless to go blundering about tiring himself out with no hope of any breakfast to revive him. So he sat himself down with his back to a tree, and not for the last time fell to thinking of his far-distant hobbit-hole with its beautiful pantries. He was deep in thoughts of bacon and eggs and toast and butter when he felt something touch him. Something like a strong sticky string was against his left hand, and when he tried to move he found that his legs were already wrapped in the same stuff, so that when he got up he fell over.

10 Then the great spider, who had been busy tying him up while he dozed, came from behind him and came at him. He could only see the thing's eyes, but he could feel its hairy legs as it struggled to wind its abominable threads round and round him. It was lucky that he had come to his senses in time. Soon he would not have been able to move at all. As it was, he had a desperate fight before he got 15 free. He beat the creature off with his hands-it was trying to poison him to keep him quiet, as small spiders do to flies-until he remembered his sword and drew it out. Then the spider jumped back, and he had time to cut his legs loose. After that it was his turn to attack. The spider evidently was not used to things that carried such stings at their sides, or it would have hurried away quicker. Bilbo came at 20 it before it could disappear and struck it with his sword right in the eyes. Then it went mad and leaped and danced and flung out its legs in horrible jerks, until he killed it with another stroke; and then he fell down and remembered nothing more for a long while.

There was the usual dim grey light of the forest-day about him when he came to his senses. The spider lay dead beside him, and his sword-blade was stained black. Somehow the killing of the giant spider, all alone by himself in the dark without the help of the wizard or the dwarves or of anyone else, made a great difference to Mr. Baggins. He felt a different person, and much fiercer and bolder in spite of an empty stomach, as he wiped his sword on the grass and put it back into its 30 sheath.

"I will give you a name," he said to it, "and I shall call you *Sting*." After that he set out to explore. The forest was grim and silent, but obviously he had first of all to look for his friends, who were not likely to be very far off, unless they had

35 been made prisoners by the elves (or worse things). Bilbo felt that it was unsafe to shout, and he stood a long while wondering in what direction the path lay, and in what direction he should go first to look for the dwarves.

40 "O! why did we not remember Beorn's advice, and Gandalf's!" he lamented. "What a mess we are in now! We! I only wish it was we: it is horrible being all alone."

45 In the end he made as good a guess as he could at the direction from which the cries for help had come in the night and by luck (he was born with a good share of it) he guessed more or less right, as you will see. Having made up his mind he crept along as cleverly as he could. Hobbits are clever at quietness, especially in woods, as I have already told you; also Bilbo had slipped on his ring before he started. That is why the spiders neither saw nor heard him coming.

50 He had picked his way stealthily for some distance, when he noticed a place of dense black shadow ahead of him black even for that forest, like a patch of midnight that had never been cleared away. As he drew nearer, he saw that it was made by spider-webs one behind and over and tangled with another. Suddenly he saw, too, that there were spiders huge and horrible sitting in the branches above him, and ring or no ring he trembled with fear lest they should discover him. Standing behind a tree he watched a group of them for some time, and then in the silence and stillness of the wood he realised that these loathsome creatures were speaking one to another. Their voices were a sort of thin creaking and hissing, but he could make out many of the words that they said. They were talking about the dwarves! [...]

"They're dead now, I'll warrant," said the first.

55 "That they are not. I saw one a-struggling just now. Just coming round again, I should say, after a bee-aautiful sleep. I'll show you."

60 With that one of the fat spiders ran along a rope, till it came to a dozen bundles hanging in a row from a high branch. Bilbo was horrified, now that he noticed them for the first time dangling in the shadows, to see a dwarfish foot sticking out of the bottoms of some of the bundles, or here and there the tip of a nose, or a bit of beard or of a hood.

65 To the fattest of these bundles the spider went—"It is poor old Bombur, I'll bet," thought Bilbo and nipped hard at the nose that stuck out. There was a muffled yelp inside, and a toe shot up and kicked the spider straight and hard. There was life in Bombur still. There was a noise like the kicking of a flabby football, and the enraged spider fell off the branch, only catching itself with its own thread just 70 in time.

The others laughed. "You were quite right," they said, "the meat's alive and kicking!"

"I'll soon put an end to that," hissed the angry spider climbing back onto the branch.

75 Bilbo saw that the moment had come when he must do something. He could not get up at the brutes and he had nothing to shoot with, but looking about he saw that in this place there were many stones lying in what appeared to be a now dry little watercourse. Bilbo was a pretty fair shot with a stone, and it did not take him long to find a nice smooth egg-shaped one that fitted his hand cosily. As a boy he used 80 to practise throwing stones at things, until rabbits and squirrels, and even birds, got out of his way as quick as lightning if they saw him stoop: and even grown-up he had still spent a deal of his time at quoits, dart-throwing, shooting at the wand, bowls, ninepins and other quiet games of the aiming and throwing sort—indeed he could do lots of things, besides blowing smoke-rings, asking riddles and cooking, 85 that I haven't had time to tell you about. There is no time now. While he was picking up stones, the spider had reached Bombur, and soon he would have been dead. At that moment Bilbo threw. The stone struck the spider plunk on the head, and it dropped senseless off the tree, flop to the ground, with all its legs curled up.

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VOCABULARY

blundering: <i>avancer d'un pas maladroit</i>	jerk: <i>(ici) convulsion</i>	loathsome: <i>détestable</i>
pantry: <i>garde-manger</i>	fierce: <i>redoutable</i>	bundle: <i>ballot, paquet</i>
wrap: <i>envelopper</i>	bold: <i>intrépide</i>	dangle: <i>pendre</i>
doze: <i>s'assoupir</i>	sheath: <i>fourreau</i>	muffled: <i>étouffé</i>
wind: <i>enrouler</i>	creep along: <i>avancer sur la pointe des pieds</i>	flabby: <i>mou</i>
thread: <i>fil</i>	stealthily: <i>à pas furtifs</i>	fair shot: <i>bon tireur</i>
		quoit: <i>palet</i>

FOCUS ON

- Understand the extract:
 - What kind of enemy is Bilbo facing in this extract?
 - What does he intend to do after killing his first enemy? Choose between the following options, and justify.
 - Rescue his friends.
 - Escape to save his life.
 - Find help.
 - Go on another adventure.
 - What device allows him to go unnoticed among these enemies?
- Focus on the protagonist:
 - List the characteristics of Bilbo, placing them in two columns: "Qualities" and "Faults".

Conclude

- List the elements which help turn a character into a hero.