

For whom the bell tolls by Ernest Hemingway



Plot summary:

The novel graphically* describes the brutality of the civil war in Spain during this time. It is told primarily through the thoughts* and experiences of the protagonist, Robert Jordan. It draws on* Hemingway's own experiences in the [Spanish Civil War](#) as a reporter for the [North American Newspaper Alliance](#).

Jordan is an American who has lived in Spain during the pre-war period, and fights in the International Brigades for the Republic against [Francisco Franco's fascist](#) forces. An experienced dynamiter, he is ordered by a Soviet general to travel behind enemy lines and destroy a bridge with the aid of a band of local anti-fascist [guerrillas](#), in order to prevent* enemy troops from responding to an upcoming* offensive. On his mission, Jordan meets the rebel Anselmo who brings him to the hidden* guerrilla camp and initially acts as an intermediary between Jordan and the other guerrilla fighters.

In the camp, Jordan encounters* María, a young Spanish woman whose life had been shattered* by her parents' execution and her rape* at the hands of the [Falangists](#) (part of the [fascist](#) coalition) at the outbreak* of the war. His strong sense of duty* clashes* with both* the unwillingness* of the guerrilla leader Pablo to commit to* an operation that would endanger himself and his band, and Jordan's own new-found lust for life* which arises from* his love for María. Pablo's wife, Pilar, usurps Pablo's leadership* and pledges the allegiance* of the guerrillas to Jordan's mission. However*, when another band of [anti-fascist](#) guerrillas, led by* El Sordo, is surrounded* and killed, Pablo steals* the dynamite detonators, hoping to prevent the demolition and thereby avoid fascist reprisals*. Although he disposes of the detonators by throwing* them down a gorge into the river, Pablo regrets abandoning his comrades and returns to assist in the operation.

However, the enemy, aware of* the coming offensive, has prepared to ambush* it in force and it seems unlikely* that the blown* bridge will do much to prevent* a rout*. Regardless of this, Jordan understands that he must still demolish the bridge in an attempt to* prevent* Fascist reinforcements from overwhelming* his allies. Lacking* the detonation equipment stolen by Pablo, Jordan and Anselmo coordinate an alternative method to explode the dynamite by using hand grenades with wires* attached so that their pins* can be pulled from a distance. This improvised plan is considerably more dangerous because the men must increase* their proximity to the explosion. While* Pablo, Pilar, and Maria create a distraction for Jordan and Anselmo, the two men plant* and detonate the dynamite, costing Anselmo his life when he is hit* by a piece of shrapnel*. While escaping, Jordan is maimed* when a tank shoots his horse out from under him. Knowing he would only slow his comrades down, he says goodbye to María and ensures* that she escapes* to safety with the surviving guerrillas. He refuses an offer from Agustín to shoot him and lies* in agony, hoping to kill an enemy officer and delay* their pursuit of his comrades before dying. The narration ends right before Jordan launches his ambush*.

graphically : *de manière très réaliste* - thought: *pensée* - draw on: (here) *s'inspirer de* - upcoming: *imminent* - prevent: *empêcher* - upcoming: *imminent* - hidden: *caché* - encounter: *rencontrer* - shatter: *ruiner, détruire* - rape: *viol* - outbreak: *début, déclenchement* - duty: *devoir* - clash: *entrer en conflit* - both: *les deux, non seulement ... mais aussi ...* - unwillingness : *réticence* - commit to : *s'engager à* - lust for life: *rage de vivre* - arise from : *résulter, venir de* - leadership : *direction* - pledge allegiance : *faire serment de loyauté* - however : *cependant* - led by : *mené par* - surrounded : *cerné* - steal : *voler* - reprisals: *représailles* - throw : *jeter* - aware of: *au courant de* - ambush: *tendre une embuscade* - unlikely: *peu probable* - blow: *(faire) exploser* - rout: *déroute* - in an attempt to: *pour tenter de* - overwhelm: *écraser* - lack: *manquer de* - wire: *fil métallique, de fer* - pin: *goupille* - increase: *augmenter* - while: *pendant, tandis que* - plant: *poser (une bombe)* - hit : *atteint* - shrapnel : *éclat d'obus* - maim : *estropier, mutiler* - ensure : *s'assurer* - escape : *s'échapper* - lie : *être allongé* - delay : *retarder* - launch an ambush : *tendre une embuscade* - foul-mouthed : *grossier*

Characters:

- Robert Jordan – American university instructor of Spanish language and a specialist in demolitions and explosives.
- Anselmo – Elderly guide to Robert Jordan.
- Golz – Soviet officer who ordered the bridge's demolition.
- Pablo – Leader of a group of anti-fascist guerrillas.
- Rafael – Well-intentioned yet incompetent and lazy guerrilla, and a gypsy.
- María – Robert Jordan's young lover.
- Pilar – Pablo's wife. An aged but strong woman, she is the de facto leader of the guerrilla band.
- Karkov – Soviet agent and journalist in Madrid, and a friend of Jordan's.
- Agustín – Foul-mouthed, middle-aged guerrilla.
- El Sordo – Leader of a fellow band of guerrillas.
- Fernando – Middle-aged guerrilla.
- Andrés and Eladio – Brothers and members of Pablo's band.
- Primitivo – Young guerrilla in Pablo's band.
- Joaquin – Enthusiastic teenaged communist, a member of Sordo's band.

