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[Home](#) > [Mythlore](#) > [Vol. 27 \(2008-2009\)](#) > [No. 1 \(2008\)](#)

## Time and J.R.R. Tolkien's "Riddles in the Dark"

[Marie Nelson](#), (emerita) [University of Florida](#)

### Abstract

Close reading of the two riddle games in *The Hobbit*—the first between Bilbo and Gollum, and the second a three-sided game where both Smaug and the reader try to decode Bilbo's riddling self-references. Discusses "priming" in riddling, how riddles work as a speech act, and the sources of riddles used in these games. Includes a translation of Bilbo's riddles to Smaug into Old English.

### Recommended Citation

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Description The legend himself, J.R.R. Tolkien reads this iconic chapter from *The Hobbit*. [disclaimer: I do not own this video. All rights to the material belong to the Tolkien estate and HarperCollins Publishing Ltd.] Click on a date/time to view the file as it appeared at that time. Date/Time. Thumbnail. Dimensions. These connections, then, along with the time riddle to which Hill drew attention, can be read as support for Tolkien's denial of originality to Bilbo and Gollum. But John D. Rateliff, quoting from a September 1947 *Letters* entry, cites this response Tolkien made to a request to reprint the "Riddles in the Dark" riddles without permission. As for the context in which Tolkien chose to place the riddles of "Riddles in the Dark," Rateliff, like Anderson, notes that Tolkien was not unaware of earlier verbal duels, but, having cited examples from the *Elder Edda*, *Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda*, the Finnish *Kalevala*, the Old English "Second Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn," and "The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise" (Adam Roberts, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Books*). The third installment in *The Hobbit* trilogy debuts this week. We're celebrating with brainteasers inspired by the riddles exchanged between Gollum and Bilbo in the fifth chapter of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. You'll find them below, under the sub-heading "Sunday Puzzle(s) #11: Riddles From a Recluse." What follows here is an explanation of where these riddles originated, and a brief introduction by Tolkien scholar Adam Roberts, author of *The Riddles of The Hobbit*. Some weeks ago, io9 reader and puzzle enthusiast Wallace Pustinjak sent me a copy of *Riddles From a Re*