

F E W M E T

N E W S L E T T E R O F T H E B A R O N Y O F T H E S C O R R E

R I D D L E S I N T H E S A G A S

Riddles in the Sagas.
Baron Fridrikr inn gamli

Anyone who has read JRR Tolkien's "children's book", *The Hobbit*, is aware of the riddle game that Bilbo Baggins plays with Gollum. It features riddles such as:

Thirty white horse on a red hill,
First they champ,
Then they stamp,
Then they stand still

The answer to this is, of course, "teeth"

One more example:

Alive without breath,
As cold as death;
Never thirsty, ever drinking,
All in mail never clinking.

The answer is "fish". (Tolkien, 1966:85,87)



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This "battle of wits" which goes on for quite a while in the roots of Moria, is a form of a Höfuðlausn, or head ransom, as Bilbo is playing for his life. All goes according to the rules, as Tolkien points out, until the last "riddle" that Bilbo puts, "What have I got in my pockets?" The answer is the gold ring that he has found on the ground (the ring that will lead the other complications, three more novels, and numerous movies, animated features, audio books, and literary criticism). Here, by not asking proper riddle, ["a question or statement intentionally worded in a dark or puzzling manner, and propounded in order that it may be guessed or answered." (Shorter OED:1735)], Bilbo cheats at the game, little knowing that he is following in the proverbial footsteps of one of the greatest riddle-game players of all antiquity, Óðinn himself.

The most famous riddle-game in Old Norse literature is contained in "The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise" in which King Heidrek gets into a contest with Gestumblindi. The introductory paragraph tells us about Gestumblindi and his prowess:

"There was a man called Gestumblindi, a powerful man and a great enemy of King Heidrek. The king sent him word to come and be reconciled, if he cared for his life. Now Gestumblindi was no great sage, and because he knew he was incapable of vying with the king in words, and knew too that it would go heavy with him if he had to abide by the judgement of the wise men, for his crimes were many, he decided on this plan: to sacrifice to Óðinn for help, to ask him to look after his case and to promise him

many gifts." (Tolkien, 1960:32) Of course, a dark stranger appears at his door, looking exactly like him and takes Gestumblindi's place at King Heidrek's court.

In this battle of wits, Gestumblindi/Óðinn exchanges riddles with King Heidrek. I'll only give you two or three to let you see the parallels to Bilbo's contest with Gollum (I'll put the answers at the close of this article).

1. What strange marvel
did I see without,
in front of Delling's door;
eight are its feet and four its eyes
and knees above belly it bears?

This riddle ponder,
O prince Heidrek.

2. What strange marvel
did I see without,
in front of Delling's door;
harder than ram's horn,
than raven blacker,
more straight than shaft,
than shield whiter?

This riddle ponder,
O prince Heidrek

3. Pale-haired bondmaids
two brides together,
carried to the storehouse
a cask of ale;

no hand turned it,
no hammer forged it,
yet outside the islands
upright sat its maker.

This riddle ponder,
O prince Heidrek
(Tolkien, 1960:35-36)

You can see that the solutions become more and more obscure and that King Heidrek is tested. There are two more I would cite, including the final riddle.

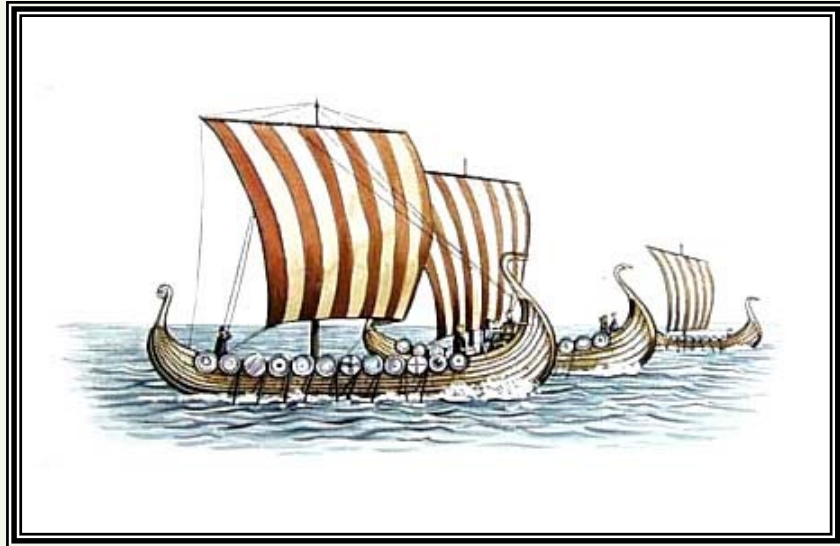
4. Four are hanging
four are walking
two point the way out
two ward the dogs off
one ever dirty

dangle behind it
This riddle ponder
O prince Heidrek
and

5. What said Óðinn
in the ear of Balder,
before he was borne to the fire?

(Tolkien, 1960:43-44)

This last, of course is not a riddle, but rather is a piece of information that only Óðinn himself can know. It gives away his identity, as becomes apparent: "You alone know that, vile creature!" cried King Heidrek, and he drew [his sword] Tyrfing and slashed at Óðinn, but he changed himself into a hawk and flew away; yet the king, striking after him, took off his tailfeathers, and that is why the hawk has been so short-tailed ever since. (Tolkien 1960:44) This ending parallels Gollum's attempt to kill Bilbo after he realizes that the hobbit has cheated him and stolen his precious ring.



This contest, the only one of any significance in the later sagas, has a famous analogue in the Poetic Edda. This is *Alvissmal* (All-Wise One's Sayings), in which Vingthor (a *heiti* or name for Thor) engages in a riddle contest against Alvis, an evil dwarf who has come to take Freya as his bride. In the poem, Vingthor asks Alvis a string of questions about what various parts of nature (and beer!) are called. In this case, Vingthor is not exactly asking riddles, but rather a kind of "Trivial Pursuit". It is noteworthy, because it might be viewed as a "teaching tool", a popular children's story in which a parent would encourage the children to give the answers to the riddles as the story progressed. Of course, we can't know this for certain, but the possibility is there. And, once again, Thor cheats, as he distracts Alvis until the sun comes up and the dwarf is turned to stone and probably shatters, as in many legends of dwarfs. (Lindow:56-57) Those who are truly up on *The Hobbit* may recall a similar fate (turning to stone) befalling the trolls who would have devoured Bilbo and his party. (Tolkien 1966:51) In her article, "Time and JRR Tolkien's 'Riddles in the Dark,'" Marie Nelson points out that "The exchange between two speakers here has been a neck riddle game, a game in which one contestant's life was at stake, and fair game or not, at the end of this part of The Hobbit story Bilbo wins the right to emerge from a long dark tunnel." (Nelson:7) Yet, Bilbo himself feels some shame at having cheated: "He knew, of course, that the riddle-game was sacred and of immense antiquity, and even wicked creatures were afraid to cheat when they played at it." (Tolkien 1966:90)

Everyone, that is, except Óðinn and Þor!

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Oh yes. The answers to the riddles from King Heidrek's Saga:

- o a spider
- o a piece of obsidian with sunlight glancing off of it.
- o a pair of swans, their eggs, and the male swan who was the father
- o a cow

No one knows the answer, as the sagas do not tell us. They only say that Óðinn whispered something terrible into Balder's ear before Balder's funeral pyre was lit.

U P C O M I N G E V E N T S

December 5, 2009

Masked Ball

Barony of Rhydderich Hael (Williamsville, NY)

December 12, 2009

Piratas Solemnitas

Barony of Delftwood (Brewerton, NY)

January 9, 2010

AEthelmearc Kingdom 12th Night

Barony of Thescorre (Rochester, NY)

A E T H E L M E A R C K I N G D O M 1 2 T H N I G H T

As the holiday season culminates in a final celebration, the Barony of Thescorre invites one and all to the Kingdom Twelfth Night Celebration, Saturday January 9th, AS XLIV (2010 CE) at the St. Mary Autocephalous Orthodox Ukrainian Church Hall, 3176 Saint Paul Blvd, Rochester, NY 14617.

The theme for Twelfth Night is a MASKED BALL. There will be food, dancing, court, dancing, food, and more dancing. The site has limited handicapped accessibility, open flame is allowed for the feast, and all alcohol MUST BE purchased at the bar.

Their Majesties' Royal Court will commence approximately 1:30pm, Feast will be served about 4:00pm followed by a dessert sideboard and dancing with live music coordinated by the Barony's Dance Mistress Baroness Peregrine until 8:00pm. Folks eating out-board are encouraged to return around 6pm for dancing and dessert.

Make a mask and enter the Mask contest. Three prizes will be given for the best overall mask, the best mask in Aethelmearc colors, and the mask that most appeals to Their Majesties. Some masks that have been made by members of the Barony will be available to purchase for a small fee.

The artisans of Aethelmearc are planning to add to the glory of the kingdom by participating in Their Royal Majesties' pilgrimage. More details to come.

The site opens at 9am and closes PROMPTLY at 9pm. The cost for the event is On-board \$18.00 per adult, \$9 ages 6 to 17; 5 and under free; Off-board \$10.00 per adult, \$5 ages 6 to 17; 5 and under free. The \$3.00 non-member surcharge will be charged at the door. Make checks payable to SCA Inc. Barony of Thescorre. Reservations are to be sent to Lady Alina Marie de Valenciennes (Joanne Parasida, 32 Zornow Drive, Rochester, NY 14623, 585-359-0726, Alina@Thescorre.org). Please include the SCA and modern names for everyone, including children 5 and under for planning purposes.

There will be a very light lunch available as part of the site fee, and the dessert sideboard is also included in the site fee. Feast is limited to 120 but there are plenty of tables for off-board.

The autocrat is Baron Fridrikr Tomasson (Tom Ireland-Delfs, 731 South Main Street, Newark, NY 14513, 315-331-3788 7pm-10pm; fridrikr@thescorre.org). Meeting requests, questions, and crash space requests should be sent to him.

The head cook is THL Bryn ni MacRose (Bryn@Thescorre.org, Toni Erwin, 196 Aberdeen Street, Rochester, NY 14619; 585-704-5193 7pm-9pm) assisted by Baroness Peregrine (Peregrine@Thescorre.org, Leslie Phillips, 161 Chili Ave, Rochester, NY 14611; 585-328-3041 7pm-10pm). Any dietary restrictions or questions should be communicated to one of them.

Directions:

From the east, From the NYS Thruway, exit 45 Rochester/Victor. Take **I-490 West** to **I-590 north** to **Titus Ave**. Turn left onto Titus Ave to **St Paul Blvd**. Turn right on **St Paul Blvd**. The site will be on your right about 1/2 mile.

From the west, From the NYS Thruway, exit 47, Rochester/LeRoy. Take **I-490 East** to **I-390 north** to **Ridgeway Avenue**. Exit to the right onto Ridgeway Avenue. Follow Ridgeway across the city until it merges with Rt. 104/Ridge Road (it will cross Lake Avenue at this point). Take the first exit after crossing the river, which is **St. Paul north**. **The site will be on your right about 1.8 miles.**

From the south, Take I-390 north to I-590 north and follow the directions from the east above.

Destination will be on the right, behind the church. Additional parking is available behind the church hall.

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Bardic Champs Lady Meadhbh
Court Jester Lord Carlo Gallucci

Fencing Lord Padraig ua Chalechair
Heavy Weapons Lord Thomas of Petersham
Thrown Weapons Lady Bronwyn nic Gregor
Youth Fighting Gabriel

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REGULARLY SCHEDULED ACTIVITIES

Fewmet endeavors to publish information as up to date as possible, but changes occur. Please check Thescore's Yahoo Group for last minute postings or consult with the appropriate officer/coordinator listed in

Baronial Social Meeting

1st Tuesday of the month

Baronial Business Meeting

3rd Tuesday of the month

7:30-9pm, 2nd floor, Adam's Street Recreation Center 85 Adam's Street Rochester, NY

Martial Arts

Archery

Currently on Hiatus
Contact Archery Marshal for information

Rapier (Fencing)

Mondays 7-9pm, + 1st & 4th Wed. of each month
Adams Street Recreation Center

Armored Combat

Thursdays 6:30-9pm
Adams Street Recreation Center

Thrown Weapons

Watch the Yahoo Group
At the home of Athos

Arts & Sciences

Western European Dance

2nd & 4th Wednesday of the month, 7-9pm
Adams Street Recreation Center

M.E. Dance & Drumming

Mondays 7-9pm
Adams Street Recreation Center

Cauldron Bleu Cook's Guild

2nd Tuesday each month, 7:30-9pm
At the home of Devon & Daedra

Brewer's Guild

Watch the Yahoo Group

Threadworker's Company

http://www.thescore.org/Threadworkers_Company/Threadworkers/Schedule.htm

Ravensong

www.thescore.org/Ravensong/RavensongHome.html

SONNET 113

by William Shakespeare



Since I left you, mine eye is in my mind,
And that which governs me to go about,
Doth part his function, and is partly blind,
Seems seeing, but effectually is out:
For it no form delivers to the heart
Of bird, of flower, or shape which it doth latch,
Of his quick objects hath the mind no part,
Nor his own vision holds what it doth catch:
For if it see the rud'st or gentlest sight,
The most sweet favour or deformed'st creature,
The mountain, or the sea, the day, or night:
The crow, or dove, it shapes them to your feature.
Incapable of more, replete with you,
My most true mind thus maketh mine untrue.



Shakespeare