

## Introduction

J. R. R. Tolkien's fantastic novel *The Hobbit; or There and Back Again* was first published in 1937. The enchanting story of tiny, furry-footed Bilbo Baggins and his adventures in Middle-earth ultimately served as the prelude to Tolkien's epic *The Lord of the Rings*, which was published in three volumes during the 1950s. These novels are perhaps the most beloved works of fantasy in the twentieth century.

*The Hobbit* is set in the imaginary world of Middle-earth. The unidentified narrator begins the tale with a description of hobbits:

*They are (or were) a little people, about half our height, and smaller than the bearded Dwarves. Hobbits have no beards.... They are inclined to be fat in the stomach; they dress in bright colours (chiefly green and yellow); wear no shoes, because their feet grow natural leathery soles and thick warm brown hair like the stuff on their heads (which is curly); have long clever brown fingers, good-natured faces, and laugh deep fruity laughs (especially after dinner, which they have twice a day when they can get it).*

## Summary and Analysis Chapter 5 - Riddles in the Dark

### Summary

Bilbo regains consciousness and, finding himself alone, tries to crawl through the tunnel. He finds a ring, which he absentmindedly pockets. He wishes he were back in his comfortable home, eating. As a hobbit, he can orient himself quite well underground, and he continues to descend the tunnel until he comes to a lake that he cannot cross, not knowing how to swim.

Bilbo is spotted by old Gollum, who lives alone on an island in the lake, which he navigates in a small boat. Gollum is a small, slimy, dark creature with pale eyes, named for the sound he makes as he swallows; he preys upon Goblins and fish. Because he lives alone, Gollum is in the habit of speaking to himself in a kind of hissing baby-talk, calling himself "my precious." Trying to assess Bilbo, he engages him in a game of riddles, at which Bilbo proves his equal.

Gollum decides to get the better of Bilbo by using his birthday present, a ring. When he wears it, he is invisible and can more easily snag his prey. He goes to the hiding place where he keeps the ring, but it is gone. Gollum correctly surmises that Bilbo has it and confronts him, asking what is in his pocket. Bilbo, who does not understand the power of the ring, slips it on his finger as Gollum runs to attack him. Bilbo becomes invisible, and Gollum cannot find him to attack.

Gollum is afraid that without the invisibility of the ring, he will be captured by the Goblins. He panics and runs to escape the cave. Bilbo, who is still invisible, follows him, thereby discovering the way out. Gollum, who can smell Bilbo, blocks his way. Bilbo thinks of killing Gollum, but



decides it would not be fair, because Bilbo is invisible and Gollum is unarmed. Bilbo escapes by an extraordinary leap over Gollum's head and through the passageway, but he runs into the Goblins. As they rush at him, he slips the ring on, becoming invisible, and narrowly escapes to the outside where it is light and the Goblins cannot follow.

### **Analysis**

In this chapter, Bilbo finds himself alone confronting danger; he is without the company of the dwarves or the direction of Gandalf. He relies effectively on his own ingenuity and resourcefulness to outwit both Gollum and the Goblins. In this and in taking the final leap over Gollum and out of the cave, Bilbo demonstrates a bravery that he did not know he possessed. He also demonstrates a sense of ethics when he decides not to kill Gollum because of his unfair advantages of invisibility and a weapon. Thus you see Bilbo developing beyond his hobbit mildness into someone who can survive danger by using good judgment and taking appropriate risks.

The depiction of Gollum is a masterpiece of symbolic characterization. He lives alone, on an island, and is so inexperienced in any kind of social interaction that he can speak only to himself, which he does constantly; additionally, his lack of development is indicated by the babyish nature of his language. Bilbo encounters Gollum when he is himself alone, trying to rejoin the dwarves. You thus see Bilbo in a kind of symbolic confrontation with a self-absorbed, immature individual, who may faintly resemble the hobbit-like disinclination to venture out into the world. Bilbo's leap over Gollum to escape the cave emphatically represents a leap he takes in his own personal development.

It is interesting to note that Tolkien heavily revised this chapter some years after the first edition of *The Hobbit*, when he was working on *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, in order to provide a history for the ring that is so important to those books.

### **Character Analysis Gollum**

Gollum is a fascinating character. His solitary life is a clue to his wicked nature; all other characters in the book, even the evil Goblins and Wargs, are members of communities. Gollum is so alone that he speaks only to himself, even on the rare occasions when he finds himself with someone else, as he does with Bilbo in Chapter 5. He speaks to others in the third person, apparently unable to say "you," and he calls himself "my precious" out of a perverted kind of self-love. He is clever, as seen when he engages Bilbo in the exchange of riddles, but his cleverness is only a means of entrapping his victims. He is the owner of the ring of invisibility, and he flies into a murderous rage when he realizes that Bilbo has found it.

### **Character Analysis Bilbo Baggins**

Bilbo Baggins, the protagonist of *The Hobbit*, is one of a race of creatures about half the size of humans, beardless and with hairy feet. He lives in an unspecified time that is at once ancient and also very like the Victorian age, with its cozy domestic routines. Like most hobbits, Bilbo is fond



of the comforts of home and hearth: He loves good, simple food in abundance, and he loves his pipe and well-furnished hobbit-hole. The book opens, in fact, with Bilbo's smoking a pipe one morning just outside his home; shortly afterward, he finds himself serving high tea — including coffee, cakes, scones, jam, tart, and pies — to thirteen dwarves. Memories of this kind of plain English food follow Bilbo throughout his hardships on his journey, when he is often hungry, and represent what home means to him. Bilbo is also fastidious: He does not like the mess the dwarves create in his home and, although he has been invited by Gandalf to join a dramatic adventure, in Chapter 2 he almost returns home because he has forgotten his handkerchiefs and his pipe.

Bilbo is called upon to do more than he imagines himself capable of. He does not like to travel, preferring the safety of his hobbit-hole, but he has inherited a streak of adventurousness from his mother's side, the Took. His adventurous Took side and his comfort-loving Baggins side are in conflict throughout much of the story. For the first half of the book, he is often hapless and rather cowardly

Bilbo finds the ring of invisibility and proves the equal of Gollum in the exchange of riddles. It is important to note that Bilbo resists the impulse to kill Gollum in Chapter 5 because he thinks it would be unfair: Gollum is unarmed, while Bilbo is invisible and armed. Bilbo is thus depicted as not only clever, but ethical.

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