

The Two Towers



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN

J. R. R. Tolkien was born in 1892 in Bloemfontein, South Africa and moved to the Birmingham countryside at the age of three after his father's death. Tolkien's mother, Mabel, homeschooled him, and he grew up a voracious reader with an interest in languages. When he was 12, his mother died, leaving him and his brother in the care of her friend Father Francis, who raised them Catholic. Father Francis ended Tolkien's budding romance with Edith Bratt, an older Protestant girl, fearing that she was distracting him from school and forbidding him from contacting her until he turned 21. When WWI began, Tolkien delayed enlisting to complete his degree at the University of Oxford, then married Edith in 1916, two months before being sent to the Western Front. While recovering from trench fever, he began recording the stories that would later be published by his son Christopher as *The Book of Lost Tales*. Though he is best known for *The Lord of the Rings* series, Tolkien had a prolific academic career, publishing highly acclaimed translations and critical essays during his time as a professor at the University of Leeds and Oxford. Tolkien's novels have remained both popular and culturally influential since their publication, inspiring numerous adaptations and popularizing the epic fantasy genre.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though Tolkien detested allegory and denied that *The Lord of the Rings* was an allegory for WWI, he admitted in a 1960 letter that his experiences in the war influenced his writing. In particular, the Dead Marshes are reminiscent of Northern France's landscape—bleak and muddy—after the Battle of the Somme, one of the bloodiest battles of the war. It is likely that the dead faces Sam and Frodo see in the mucky water were inspired by corpses Tolkien himself saw in the mud of the Somme. In addition, though Tolkien lived after the Industrial Revolution, he was greatly affected by its slow destruction of rural life and the natural landscapes of his childhood. His hatred of the noise, ugliness, and pollution of industrialization is reflected in the evils of Saruman and Sauron, who abuse and exploit the environment. The two great villains of *The Two Towers*, like industrialization itself, disrespect the beauty and sanctity of the lands of Middle-earth, destroying trees and rivers in order to create mechanized horrors.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Most of Tolkien's fiction is set in the world of Middle-earth, including [The Hobbit](#), [The Silmarillion](#), and 23 other volumes of

writing published posthumously by Tolkien's son Christopher. Another fantastical series with Christian undertones is *The Chronicles of Narnia*, written by Tolkien's friend and colleague C.S. Lewis. Though Tolkien disliked the *Narnia* books heavy allegory, the two series both explore heroism, duty, sacrifice, and the importance of fellowship. Tolkien's characters Boromir and Faramir are brothers who differ in their feelings about war and glory. They share many characteristics with the brothers Hector and Paris from Homer's *Iliad*, which explores, as *The Two Towers* does, the dictates of honor and the necessity of war. Furthermore, the culture of the Rohirrim is similar to that of the Danes in [Beowulf](#), one of Tolkien's main areas of scholarship. Tolkien is also believed to have drawn inspiration for Middle-earth from Norse and Finnish myth collected in the *Poetic Edda* and *The Kalevala*. Tolkien's novels have been incredibly influential to the fantasy genre and have inspired new generations of fantasy writers such as Ursula K. LeGuin, Terry Brooks, George R.R. Martin, J.K. Rowling, Christopher Paolini, and Patrick Rothfuss. Modern fantasy authors such as N.K. Jemisin both follow in Tolkien's footsteps and critically engage with his books by creating epic fantasy worlds full of conflict and oppression. Jemisin has written that she, as a Black woman, does what Tolkien also did in creating mythologies into which she can escape and that necessarily elevate the author's own cultural background.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Two Towers
- **When Written:** 1937–1949
- **Where Written:** Oxford, England
- **When Published:** 1954
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Epic, High Fantasy
- **Setting:** Middle-earth
- **Climax:** Gollum betrays Frodo and Sam by sending them into Shelob's lair, leading Frodo to be paralyzed by spider venom and captured by Sauron's orcs.
- **Antagonist:** Sauron
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Polyglot Penman. Tolkien enjoyed creating languages, a process he called "glossopoeia." He created as many as 20 languages before his death, in varying stages of development. The two most developed of these, Sindarin and Quenya, are elvish languages found in Middle-earth.

An Ent Among the Inklings. The character Treebeard was modeled after Tolkien's friend and fellow author C.S. Lewis, who was known for his booming voice. Lewis and Tolkien were both members of the Inklings, a group of Oxford writers who met in the Eagle and Child pub to discuss the value of fantasy fiction and share their writing.



PLOT SUMMARY

The Two Towers begins where [The Fellowship of the Ring](#) left off, after Sam and Frodo depart from the rest of the Fellowship to take the **Ring** to Mordor. Aragorn, while searching for Frodo, finds Boromir dying in the wake of a battle with a number of orcs. Boromir reveals that Merry and Pippin have been kidnapped by the orcs, who mistook them for the Ring-bearer. After giving Boromir a funeral on the river, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli decide to pursue the orcs and rescue Merry and Pippin.

They track the orc company through the valleys of Rohan, but the orcs move faster than them, traveling through the night. On the fourth day of their chase, they encounter the riders of Rohan and exchange news with Éomer, the riders' leader, who reveals that they have killed the entire orc company. Éomer urges Aragorn to give up his search for the hobbits and instead return with him to meet Théoden, the king of Rohan, but Aragorn refuses to speak to Théoden until his quest to find the hobbits is complete. He, Legolas, and Gimli travel on towards Fangorn Forest, where the riders of Rohan fought the orc company.

Meanwhile, Merry and Pippin are forced to march with the orc company, made up of several different tribes who frequently fight amongst themselves. During a scuffle, when the orcs are distracted, Pippin manages to free his hands, wrapping the bindings back around his wrists so the orcs don't notice, and drop the brooch from his cloak as a clue for Aragorn to find. The riders of Rohan pursue the orcs and surround them beside Fangorn Forest. Grishnákh, one of the Mordor orcs, kidnaps Merry and Pippin away from the Isengard orcs. When one of the riders kills Grishnákh, the hobbits escape unharmed into Fangorn forest, where they befriend an ent (a tree-herder) named Treebeard. Treebeard takes them to an assembly where the ents agree to march to war against Saruman, whose orcs abuse the forest.

Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas track Merry and Pippin from the remains of the orc company into Fangorn Forest. There, they meet Gandalf, who perished in the Mines of Moria in [The Fellowship of the Ring](#). He explains that he has been sent back to Middle-earth as Gandalf the White to complete his work and assures his three friends that Merry and Pippin are safe with the ents.

Gandalf leads Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli to Edoras to meet

with Théoden. There, Gandalf reveals that Théoden's counselor Wormtongue is working for Saruman and clears Théoden's mind of Wormtongue's corrupting influence. As Wormtongue flees to Saruman, Théoden resolves to ride to battle to face Saruman's army, bringing his nephew Éomer with him and leaving Rohan in the hands of his niece Éowyn.

On the road, Gandalf departs on a mysterious errand, and Aragorn continues with his friends and the riders of Rohan to the fortress at Helm's Deep. There, Rohan's forces are attacked by Saruman's orcs, who greatly outnumber them. When, at dawn, Aragorn and Théoden rally their men for one final charge from the fortress, they drive the orcs out of the gates. Gandalf appears on the hill above with reinforcements made of Rohan's scattered forces, and the orcs are caught between the two armies and defeated.

The group then travels to Isengard, which has been taken over by the ents, and find Merry and Pippin waiting by the gate to greet them. As Gandalf confronts Saruman, trapped in his tower, Wormtongue throws a *palantír*, a magical communication stone, down at him. When Pippin stares into it, Sauron is able to look into his mind, but Gandalf takes it from him before he can reveal any vital information. Gandalf decides to split up the group, taking Pippin and riding to Minas Tirith.

The second part of *The Two Towers* finds Frodo and Sam lost in the mountains on their way to Mordor with no food besides a dwindling supply of **lembas** bread. After Gollum follows them for several days, the hobbits finally confront him, recruiting him as their guide and making him swear on the Ring to obey Frodo. They pass through a place called the Dead Marshes, the site of a long-ago battle, where dead faces linger in the water and try to draw travelers in. Frodo is increasingly weary, burdened by the weight of the Ring and the gaze of Sauron, who searches for him.

As they travel towards the gates to Mordor, Sam insists that he and Frodo take turns sleeping and keeping watch, suspicious of Gollum, whom Sam catches debating with himself about whether to steal the Ring. When they finally reach the Black Gate of Mordor, they find it too well-guarded to enter, and Gollum convinces Frodo to follow him to a more secret path into Mordor through the mountains.

On the way, the hobbits meet a group of soldiers from Gondor led by Faramir, Boromir's younger brother. Faramir is initially suspicious of the hobbits and interrogates Frodo about Boromir's death and Isildur's bane, but he decides to trust them after Sam accidentally blurts the secret that Isildur's Bane is the Ring. Faramir promises not to take the Ring from Frodo, and when Gollum is found trespassing near their secret fortress, Faramir spares his life for Frodo's sake. Faramir tries to dissuade Frodo from following Gollum through the hidden pass into Mordor, but Frodo is adamant that he must continue his quest.

Gollum leads the hobbits past Minas Morgul, where Frodo sees the Wraith-king and is briefly tempted to put on the Ring, then up into the mountains. Frodo guesses that a war is beginning in the West, since Sauron was massing armies around both Minas Morgul and the Black Gate. After they climb a series of staircases higher into the mountains and stop to rest, Sam wonders to Frodo if people will tell stories about them someday.

After a long absence, which makes Sam suspicious again, Gollum shows them to the next part of their journey: a dark, stuffy tunnel. Sam and Frodo lose track of Gollum somewhere along the way and realize they've been led into a trap. As they hear a strange hissing noise behind them, Sam suddenly remembers Galadriel's **phial** and urges Frodo to use it. The phial brightens with starlight, and the hobbits see clusters of eyes following them. Frodo threatens the eyes with the phial and his sword, invoking Galadriel's name, and the eyes disappear. The hobbits cut their way out of the tunnel, which is blocked with something like thick spiderwebs.

The many-eyed giant spider, Shelob, follows the hobbits out of her lair as soon as Sam puts the phial away. Gollum appears again, tackling Sam to the ground, but Sam fights him, and Gollum flees back into the tunnel. Sam then attacks Shelob, who looms over Frodo, and manages to stab her in the belly. He drives her back into her lair with Galadriel's phial, shouting out an invocation in an elvish language he doesn't speak.

Frodo is covered in spiderwebs and doesn't appear to be breathing. Believing him to be dead, Sam reluctantly takes up the Ring, intending to finish Frodo's quest alone. As Sam leaves Frodo's body behind, he hears orcs approaching and puts on the Ring to become invisible. Realizing he's made the wrong choice in leaving Frodo, Sam runs back toward Shelob's lair to discover that the orcs have carried Frodo away.

Sam follows the orcs, listening to them talk, and realizes that Frodo is alive and merely paralyzed by Shelob's venom. He draws his sword to charge the orcs and rescue Frodo, but he's too far behind them. The orcs carry Frodo into the tower and close the gates, leaving Sam outside. The hobbits are separated, and Frodo is a prisoner.

figure because of his disinterest in the Ring's power and his simple willingness to undertake the quest. Frodo's humility and kindness endear him to his friends. This earns him the devoted loyalty of Sam, whom Frodo treats more as an equal than an employee, and the adoration of Gollum, who is drawn both to Frodo and the Ring he carries. Frodo's decision to not kill Gollum and, instead, to protect him and show him kindness, reveals a change in Frodo from [The Fellowship of the Ring](#), during which he told Gandalf that Gollum deserves death. Since that conversation, Frodo's experience bearing the Ring has allowed him to better understand and pity Gollum. The burden of the Ring, far from corrupting Frodo, has only made him more merciful. However, as *The Two Towers* progresses, the Ring puts more and more of a mental and physical strain on Frodo. He finds himself at times so exhausted that he's unable to stand and so depressed that he struggles to make important decisions. He depends on Sam to care for both his bodily needs—food and rest—and his spiritual and emotional needs. When Frodo is consumed by despair, certain his quest will be meaningless, Sam is there to comfort him and make him laugh. Frodo's desire to trust and rehabilitate Gollum leads him ultimately into danger in Shelob's lair, capture by the orcs of Cirith Ungol, and perhaps worst of all, separation from Sam. Though one of Frodo's most heroic qualities is his ability to inspire loyalty in others, that loyalty can't compete against the Ring's hold over Gollum, and kindness alone can't combat evil.

Samwise "Sam" Gamgee – Sam is Frodo's gardener and closest friend. His role in the Fellowship, given to him by Gandalf in [The Fellowship of the Ring](#), is to simply stay with Frodo—which he does, following him as he leaves alone for Mordor. Sam is eager to put himself in danger ahead of Frodo, to protect him from Gollum (whom Sam is deeply suspicious and a little jealous of) and to take care of him. As Frodo is worn down by the grueling travel and the burden of carrying the **Ring**, Sam makes it his mission to feed him, make sure he gets enough sleep, cheer him up, comfort him, and remind him of home. Like Merry and Pippin, Sam finds joy in silly jokes and poems, simple meals, and little daily rituals. Though Frodo is skeptical that they'll survive their quest, Sam, steadfast and stoutly optimistic, quietly rations their **lembas** and makes plans for a return trip. Sam is a working-class hobbit with no formal education, and he views Frodo as his superior in both understanding and social status. Still, Sam is highly intuitive and emotionally intelligent, and he has a wealth of wisdom gathered mainly from his father and from Bilbo's stories. He is unfalteringly devoted to Frodo, whom he loves more than anyone, and understands that his heart is wiser than his head. After Sam valiantly injures Shelob, he finds Frodo seemingly dead. He rationalizes to himself that he must take up the Ring and complete Frodo's quest for the good of the world, but his heart protests leaving Frodo. When Frodo turns out to be alive, Sam realizes that he should have listened to his heart all along.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Frodo Baggins – Frodo, a hobbit from the Shire, is the main protagonist of *The Lord of the Rings* epic. In [The Fellowship of the Ring](#), the first book of the series, he accepts the dangerous task of carrying the One **Ring** into Mordor to destroy it in the fires of Mount Doom. By the end of the novel Frodo decides to part ways with the rest of the Fellowship and travel to Mordor alone, followed only by his beloved friend and servant Sam. Though not overtly gallant or courageous, Frodo is a heroic

Gollum (Sméagol) – Gollum is a thin, hobbit-like creature who's obsessed with the **Ring**, which he carried for many years while living on an underground lake. During the events of [The Hobbit](#), the Ring abandoned Gollum and was picked up by Bilbo Baggins, who passed it on to Frodo. In the following years, Gollum was captured by Sauron and tortured for information about the Ring, and then released in the hopes that he might find it and bring it to Mordor. Gollum, compelled by his desire for the Ring, follows Frodo and Sam as they travel toward Mordor and eventually swears on the Ring to guide them to the Black Gate. The dreams the Ring tempts Gollum with are uncomplicated: he longs to be powerful enough that no one can take the Ring from him and have plenty of fish to eat. Gollum's years with the Ring warped both his body and mind, giving him two distinct personalities: the conniving Gollum who would do anything to reclaim the Ring, and the cringing, fawning Sméagol who wants to be loyal to Frodo. Gollum acts more like Sméagol around Frodo, who shows him kindness and shares some kinship with him as a bearer of the Ring. Though Frodo believes Gollum can be saved, ultimately the Ring's temptation is too strong, and Gollum wins the argument with Sméagol. Gollum leads Sam and Frodo into Shelob's lair and offers them up as a meal, planning to take the Ring from Frodo once he's dead.

Aragorn – Aragorn, the Chieftain of the Dúnedain and the heir to the throne of Gondor, embodies a dual identity in *The Two Towers*: he insists that he is both Strider (his Ranger moniker) and Aragorn (the heir of Isildur). He continues to struggle with the more difficult aspects of leadership when he is forced to decide between following Frodo and rescuing Merry and Pippin from a company of orcs. Aragorn decides to pursue the orc company, leading Legolas and Gimli on a fruitless chase across the fields of Rohan. Despite the hopelessness of the situation, Aragorn refuses to give up and abandon the hobbits. After reuniting with Gandalf, Aragorn spends time with Théoden, the king of Rohan, learning about kingship from his example and assisting him in leading the riders of Rohan during the battle of Helm's Deep. Since [The Fellowship of the Ring](#), Aragorn has grown as a leader in a way that's obvious to others—when he draws his sword and declares his title, he looks more like a legendary king than a dusty Ranger. Humble and level-headed, Aragorn longs for the day he can return to Gondor but trusts the counsel of Gandalf and goes where he's needed most.

Gandalf – After his death in [The Fellowship of the Ring](#), the wizard Gandalf is mysteriously sent back to Middle-earth to complete his task there. Now Gandalf the White rather than Gandalf the Grey, he's more powerful than before and better equipped to aid the Fellowship and their allies in defending the West from Mordor. Gandalf finds friends wherever he goes; *The Two Towers* reveals his close relationships with Treebeard the ent and Théoden (the king of Rohan), among others. He reunites with Aragorn, Gimli, Legolas, Merry, and Pippin, who are overjoyed by his return, and assists Rohan in defeating the

armies of Isengard. After replacing Saruman as the White wizard of Middle-earth, Gandalf banishes him from the Order of wizards entirely, greatly diminishing his power. Gandalf is the guiding hand of *The Two Towers*, prompting other characters to go where they need to be, bringing reinforcements to the hopeless battle of Helm's Deep, and consoling Pippin even after his nearly catastrophic mistake with the *palantír*. Even Frodo, who believes Gandalf to be dead, benefits from his counsel, deciding to spare Gollum's life after he remembers their conversation in [The Fellowship of the Ring](#). Though somewhat more serious than he was before his fall into the chasm in Moria, Gandalf remains a powerful ally, a wise mentor, and a kind friend.

Sauron – Sauron, the creator of the One **Ring** and the Dark Lord of Mordor, seeks to conquer and enslave Middle-earth. The central antagonist of *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron almost gained total control of Middle-earth once already, in the second age during the War of the Last Alliance. In *The Two Towers*, he continues to search for the hobbit who bears the Ring, both with roving orc parties and his malevolent gaze, which manifests as a red light from his tower in Mordor. Suspicious of both his allies (such as Saruman) and his enemies, Sauron prepares to wage war with the countries of the West, which he believes will attempt to use the Ring to fight against him. Sauron is disadvantaged by his own arrogance and close-mindedness—it doesn't occur to him that his enemies might try to destroy the Ring rather than use it for themselves. Similarly, rather than interrogating Pippin through the *palantír*, Sauron incorrectly assumes he already knows where Pippin is and takes the opportunity to torture him instead. Sauron is a remote figure in *The Two Towers*, remaining in his tower and sending out his Nazgûl and other allies to lead his armies in his place.

Boromir – Near the end of [The Fellowship of the Ring](#), Boromir, the proud son of the Steward of Gondor, falls prey to the **Ring's** corrupting influence and tries to take the Ring from Frodo to use in battle to defend his country. The beginning of *The Two Towers* finds Boromir dying from numerous arrow wounds after attempting to protect Merry and Pippin from a company of orcs. Though Boromir is rash and often arrogant, his final act is one of futile generosity, born out of his love for the hobbits. As he dies, he confesses his crime against Frodo to Aragorn and repents, begging him to protect Gondor. Though Boromir's greatest desire is to preserve his country, he is also driven by his deep loyalty to his friends, the other members of the Fellowship. With his death, he proves that loyalty and redeems himself. Aragorn keeps the secret of Boromir's betrayal, and he, Gimli, and Legolas give him a hero's funeral.

Faramir – While preparing to battle the men of Harad in Ithilien, Faramir, the Captain of Gondor and the brother of Boromir, meets Frodo and Sam on their way to Mordor. Though initially suspicious of the hobbits, who know more than they're

telling him and might be implicated in Boromir's death, Faramir eventually decides to trust and assist them. When he learns that Frodo bears the **Ring**, he laments Boromir's weakness in attempting to steal it to protect Gondor and swears that he doesn't want it for himself. Faramir is more thoughtful than his brother and has no love for war or power. When Gollum is caught trespassing, Faramir shows mercy, allowing him to live, and gives the hobbits supplies for their journey.

Meriadoc "Merry" Brandybuck – Merry joined the Fellowship to accompany Frodo, his friend and fellow hobbit, to destroy the **Ring**. Merry remains bold and sarcastic in the face of danger, both when he and Pippin are captured by orcs and later when Pippin is frightened by the *palantír*. Merry and Pippin are eager to do their part to protect Middle-earth, joining the ents as they march on Isengard, but still enjoy the comforts of a good meal when they're able.

Peregrin "Pippin" Took – Pippin is the youngest of the hobbits and the adventurous and curious cousin of both Merry and Frodo. His tenacity enables him and Merry to escape from captivity with the orcs and aid the ents in attacking Isengard. However, his curiosity frequently causes him trouble, as it does when he looks into the *palantír* and accidentally speaks to Sauron. Though the experience disturbs Pippin, he exemplifies the resilience typical of hobbits and quickly recovers.

Gimli – Gimli the dwarf is the playful and volatile companion of Aragorn and Legolas as they hunt down the orcs who've kidnapped Merry and Pippin. Gimli is frantic to recover the hobbits and is overwhelmed with joy and frustration to find them jovial and unharmed when they're reunited. Though he is easily insulted and quick to draw his axe, Gimli also has a passionate love of beauty—both that of Galadriel and of the caverns of Helm's Deep.

Legolas – Legolas, the cheerful and tireless son of the elf king of Mirkwood, has keen eyesight and a strong connection with trees and animals. As one of the Three Hunters, he accompanies Aragorn and Gimli to recover Merry and Pippin from the orc company that kidnapped them. Though they initially mistrust each other, Legolas becomes Gimli's staunchest defender and closest friend. During the battle of Helm's Deep, they make a contest out of how many orcs they can kill and later plan to travel together to their favorite places on Middle-earth.

Saruman – Saruman is a wizard and the former leader of the White Council. While he used to be just and fair, he has been corrupted by Sauron, who communicates with him through a *palantír*. Now, he seeks to betray both Sauron and his former friend Gandalf by taking the **Ring** for himself. Despite his massive orc armies and his many spies, Rohan defeats Saruman's forces at the battle of Helm's Deep, and the ents take over Isengard. Saruman is bitter in defeat, attempting to influence Gandalf and his companions with his enchanted

voice, but Gandalf breaks Saruman's staff and expels him from the Order of wizards, leaving him trapped in his tower.

Éomer – The nephew of Théoden, Éomer is dedicated to Rohan, protective of his family, quick to anger, and quick to forgive. When he meets Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli hunting the orc company, he challenges them and nearly comes to blows with Gimli before Aragorn intervenes and reveals his identity. Éomer is also the only man of Rohan willing to oppose Wormtongue, who then has him imprisoned. When Théoden eventually frees him, Éomer reaffirms his loyalty to Théoden and rides into battle without resentment.

Théoden – Théoden is the aging king of Rohan. At the beginning of *The Two Towers*, he's under the influence of his treacherous counselor Wormtongue, who's secretly a servant of Sauron and who dulls Théoden's senses and corrupts his judgement. When Gandalf exposes Wormtongue, Théoden is returned to his former vigor and discernment, but Rohan has suffered in his absence. Théoden determines to ride into war against Saruman, proving himself a capable leader and inspiring his disheartened men.

Treebeard – Treebeard is a 14-foot-tall treelike ent and one of the oldest creatures in Middle-earth. Wise and thoughtful, Treebeard assists Merry and Pippin when they flee into Fangorn forest, allowing them to stay in his house and bringing them to a great gathering where the ents decide to march to war against Saruman. Treebeard has a great concern for the environment and, though the ents are dying out, recognizes their potential power as he leads them to seize Isengard.

Shelob – An ancient and insatiable creature in the shape of a giant spider, Shelob lives in the tunnels near Cirith Ungol, where Sauron allows her to remain as a guard for a secret path into Mordor. Gollum, who occasionally brings her food, leads Sam and Frodo into her lair, planning to let her kill the hobbits and then to take the **Ring** from Frodo's body. Though Shelob has never before been mortally injured, Sam manages to stab her with an elf blade and drive her back into her lair with the help of Galadriel's **phial**.

Galadriel – The beautiful Lady of Lothlórien, Galadriel is an elf and an ally of Gandalf and the Fellowship. After healing Gandalf, she sends him with messages of warning for Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli. Her gift to Frodo as they left Lothlórien, a **phial** of starlight, saves the lives of Sam and Frodo when they're trapped in Shelob's lair. Men, who often hear stories about the dangers of Lothlórien, mistrust Galadriel and are surprised to hear that the Fellowship left her forest unscathed.

Háma – The loyal and trusting doorward of Rohan, Háma is friendly with Gandalf and Aragorn and amazed by the legendary weapons they carry. Despite the strict rule against weapons, he allows Gandalf to bring his staff into Théoden's hall and is subsequently demoted to errand-runner. Háma is the one to suggest Éowyn be left in charge of the people of

Rohan. He dies valiantly, defending the gate during the battle of Helm's Deep, and Théoden mourns him.

Shadowfax – Shadowfax is the Lord of the Mearas, an exceptionally swift and intelligent breed of horses from Rohan. He's a friend of Gandalf and carries him into battle. While still under the influence of Wormtongue, Théoden is angry with Gandalf for taking Shadowfax, but he later gifts Shadowfax to Gandalf in thanks for exposing Wormtongue as a spy for Saruman.

Wormtongue – Wormtongue is Théoden's advisor. He attempts to corrupt and deceive Théoden on behalf of Saruman, his secret benefactor, who has bribed him with promises of wealth and marriage to Éowyn. When Gandalf reveals him as a spy, he flees to Isengard, where he later throws Saruman's *palantír* out the window at Gandalf.

Isildur – Isildur is Aragorn's ancestor who famously cut the **Ring** from Sauron's hand during the War of the Last Alliance and kept it for himself. Later, during an ambush, the Ring betrayed him and slipped from his finger, allowing orcs to find and kill him. For this reason, the Ring is sometimes referred to as "Isildur's Bane."

The Wraith-king – The Wraith-king is the leader of the Nazgûl, Sauron's nine servants and the bearers of rings of power. When Frodo passes by Minas Morgul on the way to Mordor, he sees the Wraith-king leading an army to invade Gondor. The Wraith-king senses the presence of the **Ring** but continues on to Ithilien when Frodo resists the temptation to put it on.

Bilbo Baggins – Bilbo Baggins is Frodo's uncle and Gandalf and Aragorn's friend. He's an elderly hobbit living in Rivendell during the events of *The Two Towers*. Bilbo possessed the **Ring** for many years, unaware of its importance, and passed it on to Frodo. Cheerful and kind, Bilbo enjoys composing poems and telling the stories of his old adventures to the younger hobbits.

Uglúk – The captain of the Isengard orcs who kidnap Merry and Pippin, Uglúk struggles to maintain control over the Mordor orcs and Northern orcs in the company. Aggressive and violent, he forces Merry and Pippin to run alongside the orcs and plans to deliver them directly to Saruman. Éomer kills Uglúk near Fangorn Forest.

Grishnákh – Grishnákh is the leader of the Mordor orcs and part of the company that abducts Merry and Pippin. Combative with the Isengard orcs and loyal to Sauron, Grishnákh fears that Saruman will take the credit for the capture of the hobbits and attempts to steal them to deliver the **Ring** to Sauron personally. A rider of Rohan kills him as he's sneaking away from the orc company.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Éowyn – Cold and stern but beautiful, Éowyn is Éomer's sister and Théoden's niece. While offering wine to Théoden's guests,

she appears interested in Aragorn, who is polite but not encouraging. Théoden leaves Éowyn behind to lead Rohan when the men ride to war against Saruman's orcs.

Erkenbrand – The Lord of Westfold in Rohan, Erkenbrand disappears after a devastating battle with Saruman's orc armies. During the battle of Helm's Deep, Gandalf reunites Erkenbrand with his scattered forces, and they ride to the aid of Théoden and the remaining riders of Rohan.

The Balrog – The Balrog is a creature of shadow and flame who drags Gandalf down into a chasm in Moria during [The Fellowship of the Ring](#). In *The Two Towers*, Gandalf explains that he killed the Balrog by throwing him down from Durin's tower onto the mountainside.

Mablung – One of Faramir's guards, Mablung is left with Damrod to protect Frodo and Sam during the battle with the men of Harad in Ithilien. The guards converse with the hobbits, and Mablung is particularly friendly with Sam.

Damrod – Damrod is one of the two men Faramir leaves to guard Frodo and Sam during the battle with the men of Harad. He explains the battle to the hobbits and admits that he believes Gondor will soon fall to Sauron.

Anborn – Anborn is one of Faramir's men stationed in Ithilien who sees Gollum in the trees and mistakes him for a wild animal. Later, when Gollum trespasses in the pool at the Window of the Sunset, Anborn is the one to capture Gollum as he tries to attack Frodo.

Elrond – Elrond is the half-elven Lord of Rivendell, who calls the council that founds the Fellowship in [The Fellowship of the Ring](#) and offers them advice as they depart for Mordor.

Celeborn – Celeborn, an elf, is Galadriel's husband and rules Lothlórien with her. In [The Fellowship of the Ring](#), Celeborn and Galadriel offer the Fellowship shelter and advice. In *The Two Towers*, Legolas and Pippin recall Celeborn's warnings about the dangers of Fangorn Forest.

Quickbeam – Quickbeam is a young and hasty ent who's eager to go to war against Saruman. He keeps Merry and Pippin company while Treebeard is at the ent assembly.

Gorbag – Gorbag is an orc captain at Cirith Ungol who suspects that Sauron has made a tactical error of some kind. He and Shagrat discover Frodo near Shelob's lair and carry him into the tower.

Shagrat – Shagrat is the commander of an orc garrison at Cirith Ungol. Along with Gorbag, Shagrat takes Frodo prisoner and insists that he be kept safe while his possessions are sent to Sauron.

Denethor – Denethor is Boromir and Faramir's father. He is the current Steward of Gondor and resides in Minas Tirith.

Théodred – The son of Théoden and heir to the throne of Rohan, Théodred is killed in battle with Saruman's army five

days before Théoden rides to Helm's Deep.

Gwaihir – Known as the Windlord, Gwaihir is the king of the Great Eagles. After Gandalf defeats the Balrog, Gwaihir carries him from the top of Durin's tower to Galadriel in Lothlórien.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



DECLINE AND DECAY

In *The Two Towers*, the second volume in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series, characters travel through ruined monuments, barren lands, vast gravesites, and failing kingdoms. The threat Middle-earth faces is not only from Sauron, who intends to conquer everything and destroy the world as the protagonists know it, but also from the corruption and failure found in the civilizations of men, leaving them more vulnerable to Sauron's influence. As Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli travel through Rohan, and Sam and Frodo search for an entrance to Mordor, their surroundings indicate that Middle-earth has declined, slowly and unnoticed, from a beautiful and noble past to a bleak and hopeless present. It is now characterized by a loss of hospitality, morality, honor, and natural beauty. The ents, who once shepherded the trees of Middle-earth, are few and fading into legend. Faramir and Théoden anticipate the imminent end of their nations as Sauron readies his forces for war. Middle-earth is a dying world, hastened into its grave by the influence of Sauron, whose orcs kill the men of the West and burn the land. The Fellowship, in striving to destroy the **Ring** and defeat Sauron, attempts also to halt the swift decaying of Middle-Earth. As virtuous men step forward to lead, and hobbits dream of growing gardens in barren lands, they seek to not only preserve their world, but to undertake the restoration of the Middle-earth that has been lost, to return the realms of men to their former righteousness and natural beauty. Through this mission, *The Two Towers* suggests that a place's physical state is tied to its rulers' morality—decline and decay are symptomatic of evil and corruption, while beauty is rooted in goodness—and therefore that restoring a decaying place to its former glory is a noble, worthwhile pursuit.

Sauron and Saruman's destructive influence is mirrored in the slow corruption of Middle-earth's natural landscapes. The hobbits, in particular, as a race of peaceful gardeners and lovers of nature, notice the destruction of the natural world. Merry and Pippin are witnesses to the deterioration of the land of Isengard and the destructiveness of the orcs who fell the trees

of Fangorn forest, leaving "wastes of stump and bramble" behind them. The orcs, servants of both Sauron and Saruman, have no respect for the lands they inhabit, burning Rohan's fields and farmlands as they march to attack Helm's Deep. Merry and Pippin also learn of the decline of the ents, who, as guardians of nature, parallel the decline of Middle-earth's natural lands. Treebeard, a very old ent, is a remnant of the Middle-earth that once was, wild and fruitful. Sam and Frodo also encounter firsthand the effect of Sauron's rule on the land they pass through. The mountains are treacherous and barren, offering nothing for the hobbits to eat or drink and little real shelter. Though not all the land Sauron has conquered is completely "barren and ruinous," his influence on the natural world is undeniable. Even Ithilien, which used to be part of Gondor and hasn't yet "fallen wholly into decay," shows signs of desolation, pollution, and corruption. Moreover, the land is not quick to heal after it's damaged. A great battle during the War of the Last Alliance, when Sauron rose to power in the Second Age, turned the Dead Marshes into a foul-smelling wasteland. The fact that the bodies in the marsh are not there physically indicates spiritual (as well as just ecological) damage to the land that isn't easily remedied.

As the land has been corrupted by evil, so too have the nations of men experienced a slow internal decline from morality and honor to selfishness, carelessness, and complacency in the face of evil. Faramir, as a scholar of Gondor's history and lore, is the primary observer of this decline. He explains to Frodo Gondor's failings, which "brought about its own decay, falling by degrees into dotage" as its men grew lazy and arrogant. Gandalf, too, who was alive to witness Rohan and Gondor's former ages, remarks on the decline of the morality of men as evidenced in Rohan's "lessened" courtesy. Many of the men of the west, from Faramir's soldiers to Théoden himself, understand that they almost certainly face the eradication of their countries and the destruction of their ways of life. The imminent threat comes from Sauron and his invading armies, but the fault lies partly in Rohan and Gondor themselves, for not remaining vigilant against their enemy and allowing him to regain power in the east. The narration is full of the language of decline and finality as the nations of the West rally for a final stand and "the last host of Rohan" rides to war. Faced with their destruction, the men of the West have little hope, yet resolve to fight to the bitter end.

Yet, though Middle-earth's decline is evident, its survival is not as hopeless as the men of the West fear. Rohan and Gondor seek to hold back the tide of Sauron's army long enough for Frodo to destroy the Ring and significantly weaken Mordor's power. While their primary goal is preservation, they also take steps to restore Middle-earth. Merry and Pippin accompany Treebeard and the ents to reclaim Isengard for the natural world, flooding the river Isen to wash away the pollution and mechanization. In the ultimate symbol of the land itself fighting

back against its oppressors, the huorns exterminate orcs at the battle of Helm's Deep. Virtuous men and women, who embody the righteousness of the men of Middle-earth's past—Aragorn, Faramir, Éowyn, and Éomer—appear as if “out of the forgotten days” to lead their nations. These attempts at Middle-earth's restoration, though they seem small in the face of the enemy and the ongoing threats of climate change and corruption, are not meaningless acts, but rather indicate a solemn intention to heal from the current barrenness of both land and virtue and regain a righteous and fertile Middle-earth.



GOOD AND EVIL

The *Lord of the Rings* series, beginning with [The Fellowship of the Ring](#), initially presents the traditional epic trope of the struggle between good and evil as relatively simple and straightforward. Sauron, who appears only as a watchful and malevolent gaze, is uncomplicated and purely evil in his desire to enslave Middle-earth. Likewise, characters such as Aragorn, the true king of Gondor, are similarly presented as purely righteous. However, the second volume, *The Two Towers*, complicates the series' understanding of the fundamentally opposed forces of good and evil through characters who undergo moral struggles. For instance, though Boromir gives in to the **Ring's** influence, he also sacrifices his life to protect Merry and Pippin. Saruman, on the other hand, was on the side of the wizards and the White Council for many years, but he falls prey to Sauron's influence and his own greed, destroying the land of Isengard and waging war with Rohan in his schemes for domination. Théoden, who cares deeply about his people, allows himself to be poisoned by the counsel of Wormtongue and sits idle as his country suffers. Gollum is split in two by his opposing desires: half of him longs to be good and keep his promise to Frodo, while the other half is completely corrupted and malicious, desiring only the Ring. As the war begins and the world of Middle-earth grows more complicated, it becomes more difficult to categorize absolute evil and absolute good—and, in characters where the two forces blur, to distinguish which is the more powerful force. Through the struggles of characters who are neither purely good nor purely evil, *The Two Towers* uncovers the murkiness of morality and reveals that the struggle between good and evil occurs not only on battlefields, but also within individual hearts and minds.

Boromir is fallible, neither purely good nor purely evil, and the temptation of the Ring is “too sore a trial” for him to overcome. *The Two Towers* presents a world in turmoil at the brink of war, and it begins with the dissolution of the Fellowship—a company of nine people created to take the Ring to Mordor and destroy it—partially due to Boromir's actions. The Ring exploits what is seemingly one of Boromir's most heroic and noble qualities—his desire to protect and preserve his homeland and its people. At the end of [The Fellowship of the Ring](#), it drives him

to try to take the Ring from Frodo, revealing his susceptibility to influence and the allure of power. This act does not, however, reveal him to be wholly evil, as Sauron, the Nazgûl, or the orcs have proven to be. His next and final act, heroically sacrificing his life in the defense of Merry and Pippin, is one of love and selflessness, completely opposed to his arrogant desire for the Ring. Boromir's tragic fate is the first indication of the newly complicated nature of morality in Middle-earth and proves the power of the Ring to corrupt even the most noble of men.

Both Saruman, once the greatest wizard of the Order, and Théoden, the king of Rohan, also fall prey to corruption. While Saruman spends *The Two Towers* destroying the land and seeking to empower himself—aims that aren't purely good or selfless—his past righteousness indicates that he might not be purely evil, either. Théoden is similarly corrupted by external influence, though, like Boromir and unlike Saruman, he redeems himself after his release from that influence. Wormtongue's counsel keeps Théoden complacent and inactive during a crucial time for Rohan, which desperately needs its king's intervention for guidance and protection. In his idleness, Théoden has failed his nation, allowing evil into his borders and into his house. Eventually, though, he moves from his complacency to join the side of good in the straightforward conflict against the obvious evil of Sauron. These examples of shifting loyalties again indicate that morality in Middle-earth is not always easily categorized.

Gollum, who has two distinct personalities that verbally argue, is perhaps the best example of how good and evil both combine and struggle for dominance in one character. One of those personalities, who speaks on the Ring's behalf, attempts to drive the other personality, Sméagol, to betrayal and murder. Though Sam is certain that the Sméagol personality is primarily an act put on for Frodo's benefit, it is unclear just how much Gollum struggles to reconcile his two opposing desires. Though Gollum's desire for the Ring is ultimately more powerful than his wish for goodness and friendship, his internal conflict is revealed in the moment just before Shelob's lair when, resembling an “old weary hobbit,” he reaches out to touch Frodo's knee. Had Sam not spoken roughly to him at that crucial moment, it's possible that Gollum's more benevolent side might have prevailed.

In the absence of absolute goodness and absolute evil, the reader's judgement of these characters is complicated by a number of factors, including the characters' own actions (some good and some evil) and the external influence that Sauron, Wormtongue, or the Ring place on them. The deciding factor in what makes a character a hero or a villain—that is, primarily aligned with good or evil—must lie in the character's informed and continued choices. Boromir and Théoden, though influenced by evil, repent of that evil and choose to align themselves with the forces of good. Saruman, though, refuses to break free of evil's influence when Gandalf offers him the

opportunity to join him. As the world grows more complicated, however, so do the characters and the choices those characters make. Gollum never becomes truly free of the Ring's influence. Though a reader might classify Boromir and Théoden as heroic despite their mistakes, and Saruman as villainous despite his former goodness, Gollum is significantly harder to classify. The conflict of good and evil rages on in him throughout *The Two Towers*; not even he knows which is stronger.



DUTY

In Tolkien's *The Two Towers*, each member of the Fellowship, the group of allies endeavoring to destroy the **Ring**, takes on a great responsibility to

their quest, to each other, and to Middle-earth at large. Occasionally, however, these responsibilities change and conflict, forcing characters (in particular, Aragorn, Frodo, and Sam) to make difficult decisions about which duties to prioritize. When faced with an obstacle, Aragorn, Frodo, and Sam are each compelled to make an often-agonizing sacrifice of one responsibility in favor of another. Aragorn has the horrible choice of which pair of hobbits to follow when the Fellowship is separated and must reconcile himself to the idea of abandoning Sam and Frodo to save Merry and Pippin. Later, Frodo, exhausted, unsure of himself, and bearing his duty unwillingly, must decide between two equally dangerous paths into Mordor. Near the end of the novel, Sam, believing Frodo to be dead, has to reorient his priorities entirely and prepare himself to bear the Ring after having only ever had one duty—to protect and care for Frodo. He can't fulfill either his duty or Frodo's until he decides which is more important, and he "must make up [his] own mind"—there's no one left to advise him. Duty often leads to this sort of inner turmoil in *The Two Towers* as the characters each struggle to determine what their greatest responsibility is and what it means to them, characterizing duty as both burdensome and necessary, whether or not it is taken on willingly. Devotion to a just duty, despite the grief and difficulty that accompanies making the right decisions to adhere to it, is what fundamentally separates Aragorn, Frodo, and Sam from their enemies, who frequently abandon duty and change loyalty.

Aragorn's first struggle, as he faces the dissolution of the Fellowship, is to determine what his duty is and who he has a duty to. In Gandalf's absence, Aragorn took it upon himself to lead the Fellowship, the goal of which was to deliver Frodo and the Ring to Mordor. However, now that Frodo and Sam have run away on their own, and Merry and Pippin are in deadly danger, he must reconsider his priorities and responsibilities. There is no easy answer; Aragorn can't pursue both pairs of hobbits and must choose between them. It is a painful, "evil" decision. Ultimately, Aragorn decides that his responsibility is to those who most need him. While his initial duty was bound to Frodo and the quest, he is forced to accept that Frodo is no

longer his responsibility. Though Gandalf later assures him that it was the right and "just" choice, the choice itself and the doubt that follows are a heavy burden for Aragorn, especially when the chase after Merry and Pippin turns out to be a "vain pursuit." Still, in the end, the choice leads him where he needs to be: reunited with Gandalf and joining the war in Rohan.

Frodo's quest to carry the Ring into Mordor and destroy it is both the most vital duty in *The Two Towers*, essential for the survival of Middle-earth, and the most difficult to accomplish. Frodo is devoted to his duty, but suffers under it, faced with obstacles and dilemmas on the way to Mordor and finding himself faltering and lost. Just as Legolas and Gimli couldn't advise Aragorn on his choice, Frodo is left without any counsel but Gollum on what path to take into Mordor. Both of his options seem pointless, leading to "terror and death" either way, and he agonizes over the choice. Still, he knows that it's his responsibility to decide, since he took on the duty of carrying the Ring. Frodo spends some time sitting outside the Black Gate, paralyzed by fear, indecision, and the knowledge that his choice impacts the fate of Middle-earth. Despite his turmoil, and in a moment of levity with Sam, Frodo is able to make his decision. He trusts Gollum and follows him to Cirith Ungol, where Gollum plans to betray him. Had he chosen to try to enter the Black Gate, however, he would likely have been captured.

Sam, left directionless when he believes Frodo is dead, must similarly sort out his choices and determine which of his conflicting responsibilities is most important. He knows that he should take up the Ring and finish Frodo's quest to save Middle-earth, but something in him is set against it. With Frodo gone, his duty changes suddenly and drastically. Now, it seems, he must assume Frodo's responsibilities as the Ring-bearer, a monumental task that he never thought he would have to contend with. He doesn't have time to return the Ring to the elves, and he can't do what he wants and stay by Frodo's body because he and the Ring would eventually be caught. Facing deep grief and internal conflict, Sam's head wars with his heart as he attempts to reconcile Frodo's duty to Middle-earth with his own devotion to Frodo. Reluctantly, knowing it's the right choice but *feeling* that it's the wrong one, he decides to take the Ring from Frodo's body and carry on. His heart is quickly proven right when orcs appear and reveal that Frodo is alive after all—but, in his "wrong" decision, he inadvertently saves the Ring from capture.

Aragorn, Frodo, and Sam are compelled by their duty to face an inner struggle in deciding what their greatest duty is and how best to fulfill it. For each of them, duty is a great burden, despite the fact that none of the difficult decisions they make turn out as planned. Still, what separates them from their enemies, who frequently betray and abandon one another, is not the success of their endeavors, but their willingness to try. When faced with a difficult choice demanded by duty, there is nothing to do but

contend with it or abandon duty and walk away. Aragorn, Frodo, and Sam each rise to the challenge, for better or worse.



JOY AND OPTIMISM VS. DESPAIR

As the opposing forces of good and evil battle in *The Two Towers*, so too do the opposing forces of joy and despair. Saruman and Sauron seek to empower

themselves and dominate Middle-earth not only through the force of their armies, but also through a campaign of fear and intimidation, leading many characters such as Faramir and Théoden to despair, believing that they will live to witness the fall of their kingdoms. Despite their situations' danger and hopelessness, however, many characters (particularly the hobbits) find occasions for joy and spread their optimism to the despondent. Merry and Pippin, comforted by good food and wine in Isengard after the orcs mistreat them, offer Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli the same comforts to combat their fatigue and despair. When Frodo is bowed under the weight of the **Ring** and the oppressive gaze of Sauron, making him weary and hopeless, Sam keeps him safe and sane, cooking stew for him, reminding him of home, and making him laugh. The dueling forces of optimism and despair exist both interpersonally and individually, within a single character undergoing an internal battle with their own hopelessness. Through the characters' endeavors to remain optimistic in the face of impossible odds, *The Two Towers* emphasizes the importance of joy in the fight against an enemy who weaponizes malice and despair.

The antagonists of *The Two Towers* use despair to oppress the men of Gondor and Rohan. The Eye of Sauron is a depressive force that permeates the air of the wastelands around Mordor and wears Frodo down. Sam's indomitable optimism is the force that combats Frodo's despair: he takes pleasure in the simple act of cooking and sharing food with Frodo, cheerfully recites childhood poems and songs, and recalls the goodness and beauty of Lothlórien and the Shire. While Sam's joy can't entirely overcome Frodo's despair, it comforts him and allows him frequent reprieves from the weight of his burden. As Frodo himself admits, he "wouldn't have got far without Sam" to support him. Wormtongue, while dulling Théoden's senses, also makes him hopeless and convinces him that action against Isengard is futile. After Théoden is freed, he regains some of his optimism with Gandalf's help, remarking that the world is "not so dark" as he believed while under Wormtongue's influence. When Gandalf and the men of Rohan confront Saruman, Saruman uses his voice to cause despair, attempting to convince Théoden and his men that Rohan will fall and that Gandalf will betray them. Though Gandalf is too pragmatic to be truly optimistic about the war's outcome, he is frequently hopeful, and his hope is a balm to many characters around him. In the midst of overwhelming despair, Gandalf can console his friends, assuring them that there is still a chance of victory—that "the great storm is coming, but the tide has

turned."

As well as facing despair embodied or wielded by an antagonist, characters must face their own internal despair and find ways to combat it. Many, such as Théoden and Frodo, take comfort and find optimism in their relationships with friends and allies. Others turn inwards for reprieve. Aragorn—who is simultaneously fearing for Gondor, mourning the loss of his friends, and frustrated by his own failings—leans on his sense of purpose, duty, and responsibility to see him through his bouts of despair. Faramir, certain that Gondor will fall because of its own slow decline, finds comfort in adhering to the ideals of the wise and righteous founders of Gondor. While the leaders of men focus on duty and lofty ideals, the hobbits, meanwhile, find respite from despair in their everyday customs and rituals of smoking and sharing meals—customs that may appear to be "low" and cheap pleasures but actually reveal a deep appreciation of life. The hobbits, who are small themselves, find value and joy in small things. It is Merry and Pippin's delight in what might be described as "creature comforts" that especially insulates them from despair. Besides finding joy in food, rhymes, and his own jokes about Gollum, it is Sam's practicality—his focus on providing the simple necessities of food and rest—and his devotion to Frodo that combat his despair so effectively that he hardly notices Mordor's oppressive air.

Despair is not merely an emotion, but a crushing and paralyzing weight. As Saruman, Wormtongue, and Sauron weaponize despair, so too can the protagonists find weapons of their own—using what brings them purpose and joy as a shield to beat back their enemies. Combatting despair through friendship, conversation, or the resolve of a character's own heart is essential both for survival and the fight against Sauron. While despair is not inherently evil or even inherently connected to the enemy—as all creatures of Middle-earth are susceptible to fear and sadness—to *give in* to that despair is to allow the enemy to win. Each time the hobbits find an opportunity for joy and Gandalf gives Théoden a reason to hope, it's a small victory that contributes to the greater fight.



POWER

In *The Two Towers*, Sauron's ongoing struggle for dominion over Middle-earth results in the beginning of an outright war for power between the armies of Mordor and the men of the West, aided by elves, dwarves, and hobbits. However, the war is not only about who *has* power, but also the *idea* of power: how it should be used and what purpose it serves. Sauron perceives power as a dominating force, used to enslave and control, while those who oppose him see it as a tool meant to serve and protect. The **One Ring** (sometimes called the Ring of Power) continually seduces characters with Sauron's promise of power—it can be used to empower its wielder and dominate their enemies. And while

these two concepts of power clash on the battlefields of Rohan in outright conflict, they also exist in conflict within individuals: Boromir, Saruman, and Gollum are each corrupted by this promise of absolute control, though they each have different intentions for how they'll use that control. These characters' transformations suggest that the desire to dominate others will invariably turn destructive, regardless of a person's motivations. Furthermore, through Sauron's ignorance of the Fellowship, a group that plans to destroy the Ring, *The Two Towers* shows that while the idea of absolute power and domination is seductive, using power for selfish aims is a weakness rather than a strength.

For both Sauron and Saruman, power is something for a single despot to hoard and use. Sauron prepares his armies for war in *The Two Towers* primarily out of suspicion that Gondor, wielding the power of the Ring, will soon attack Mordor. He seeks to destroy the realms of men that oppose him—but, more importantly, to recover the Ring. This will provide him with nearly unstoppable power, enabling him to enslave the other rings of power and completely dominate Middle-earth. As the sole ruler of Middle-earth, Sauron will exploit and control everyone under his power. Saruman, who wants the Ring for himself, seeks to do the same. His goals are visible in his treatment of Isengard; he destroys the land and the growing things on it to empower himself. He sends his orcs out to find the Ring-bearer, hiding his intentions from Sauron and attempting to steal power from him. If power is transferred, it is transferred by means of trickery or violence. It is never shared or used unselfishly.

Among the forces opposing Sauron—the men of the West, the elves, and their allies—power is held for the benefit of others. Their goal is not specifically to possess power, but rather to ensure that Sauron doesn't take the ultimate power that he desires. Rather than allow the ultimate power of the Ring to exist, the Fellowship seeks to destroy it to ensure that no one (Sauron, Saruman, or one of their own kingdoms) has the ability to conquer the world. Instead, they seek to share what power remains after the destruction of the Ring among Middle-earth's different races. Though Rohan and Gondor are monarchies in which individuals hold power over the rest of the population, the future leaders of these kingdoms are just and generous, trusted to wield power for the good of the many. Aragorn, the destined king of Gondor, has no desire to subjugate his people, but to serve and empower them. This idea of shared power for the protection of the world is fundamentally incompatible with Sauron's desire to hoard and dominate—there is no way for the two to coexist on Middle-earth.

The seductiveness of the Ring and the power it holds lies not only in the personal aggrandizement it offers its wielder, but also in the idea that ultimate dominating power could be used to improve the world. Boromir falls victim to this falsehood, as Isildur did in the Second Age. Boromir's intentions are good: he

has been convinced (by his own wishes or the Ring's influence) that he should use the Ring in battle against Sauron to protect Gondor and the rest of Middle-earth. However, this idea—that absolute power can be wielded for the benefit of others—is a false dream, one that leads Boromir to betray Frodo and the Fellowship's ideals in trying to seize ultimate power for himself. In practice, using power to dominate and control others (even, ostensibly, for the sake of the common good) never makes things better—it only corrupts.

While Sauron's idea of individual and ultimate power makes him strong, it is also a weakness. His arrogance and closed-mindedness prevent him from seeing beyond his own desires, meaning he can't believe that any conception of power beyond his own exists. Because he wants the Ring, he assumes that the men of the West want it as well, and that they plan to use it as *he* would use it. With no concept of a selfless use of power, Sauron can't imagine that anyone would seek to destroy the Ring and throw away the power it holds. In the end, his selfishness and shortsightedness leave him vulnerable to the Fellowship's plan to destroy the Ring.



HEROISM, HONOR, AND GLORY

In *The Two Towers*, characters frequently compare their own experiences to stories of heroic deeds and wonder whether their actions will be recorded or bring them fame. To encourage Legolas and Gimli, Aragorn predicts that their hunt for the orcs will be “accounted a marvel” among the stories of Middle-earth. Merry, while praising Pippin's resourcefulness in freeing them from capture, tells him that he'll get a chapter in Bilbo's book. Frodo, watching an army march towards Osgiliath, fears suddenly that his quest is too late, and that “no one will ever know” what he accomplished. Sam wonders if the tale of Frodo and the **Ring** will ever be told as a bedtime story for children. Yet Aragorn and the hobbits are motivated to do what is right—and often difficult—regardless of whether anyone will know about it, and even when they are certain that no one will. While there is an allure to the sort of glory that accompanies being put into a story, and while it can be comforting to think that one's deeds might be remembered, *The Two Towers* continually asserts that true heroism involves a devotion to honor rather than glory, and to internal values rather than external reward.

Rather than urging Legolas and Gimli to seek fame for an empty reason, Aragorn prioritizes saving their friends above all else. They are undertaking a chase that no one besides themselves will see—what they need is speed, not glory. Surpassing legendary heroes' bravery and skill in hunting down the orcs is a feat that's worthy of glory—but glory isn't their motivator, and it's only a byproduct of their efforts. Similarly, though Merry and Pippin aren't opposed to the idea of glory and earning a place in Bilbo's book, fame isn't what motivates them to act heroically. While escaping from the orcs, they are motivated

solely by necessity and their desire to live. Pippin acts to save their lives without any thought of fame or praise, and it is only once they're safely away from the battle that Merry is able to look back and glorify him.

Similar to Aragorn, Merry, and Pippin, Frodo undertakes the quest to destroy the Ring because of a need rather than a desire for fame or glory, but, as he travels into Mordor, the idea of being remembered becomes increasingly important to him. As Frodo watches the army march from Minas Morgul, he fears that Middle-earth will be destroyed by Sauron's forces before he can complete his quest. In that case, everything he suffered will be for nothing. Even if he does succeed in destroying the Ring, no one will ever know, because there will be "no one [he] can tell." In the moment, it's desperately important to Frodo that his story be heard and his pain acknowledged. It is a selfish desire, born from his fear and despair, but one that's perhaps natural given how alluring the promise of recognition can be. Still, when Frodo gathers the strength to stand, he feels certain that his quest is inherently worth finishing. He decides that he must destroy the Ring if he is able, "and that whether Faramir or Aragorn or Elrond or Galadriel or Gandalf or anyone else ever knew" about what he did is beside the point. Even though he believes that he's likely to die attempting to destroy the Ring, and that no one will know what happened to him, he has to do it because it's the right thing to do.

Sam, though aware of the allure of fame, is driven to heroism by his love for Frodo rather than selfish aggrandizement. In wondering whether Frodo will ever be in a fireside story, Sam doesn't seek glory, but rather comforts himself and dreams of some validation that their efforts mattered. Frodo's presence in stories, in some future day, inherently means that there will be a Middle-earth that still has bedtime stories and little hobbits who want to hear them. Sam's faraway hope is for Frodo to have the recognition he deserves and to "live to tell" his story—he doesn't want fame for himself and doesn't believe "Samwise the Stouthearted" has any place in the tale at all. Sam is driven exclusively by his selfless devotion to Frodo. It motivates him to both the mundane heroism of caring for Frodo and the incredible courage required to defend Frodo from Shelob.

When Sam and Frodo discuss stories, they suggest that people just wander into a story, as they did, and decide to accept the responsibility of being in one—no one, they think, would willingly endure what they're currently enduring. This implies that seeking out dangerous opportunities for glory when there is no real need is foolish and self-destructive, not truly heroic. Heroism implies necessity—a hero does what they must because they have to. Glory and recognition might come from a heroic action, but if glory is the *purpose* of the act, it isn't truly heroic.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE RING

The One Ring, which tempts and influences its bearers with visions of power in its efforts to return to Sauron, its only true master, is a symbol of the corrupting influence of power. The Ring was created by the Dark Lord Sauron to enable him to enhance his own power and gain control of Middle-earth. Just as Sauron desires control over the people of Middle-earth's free will, the Ring reads the fears and desires of the people around it, manipulating their thoughts and guiding their choices. At the end of [The Fellowship of the Ring](#), Boromir falls prey to the Ring's seduction, attempting to steal it from Frodo and use it to protect Gondor from Sauron's armies. Then, Frodo uses Gollum's desire and respect for the Ring to secure his help as a guide to lead him into Mordor. Gollum's obsession with the Ring, which he carried for many years, has turned him into the strange creature he appears as in *The Two Towers* and has split his mind into two. Half of him speaks for the Ring, tempting and corrupting the other half with promises of revenge, power, and unlimited food. While the Ring can bring its bearer incredible power, it has its own goals, proven in its betrayal and abandonment of both Isildur and Gollum.

Frodo, the Ring-bearer, must constantly contend with the Ring's dragging weight and the temptation to use it for himself as they approach Mordor. The Ring's attempt to corrupt Frodo is slow and wearying. It seeks to eventually corrupt his mind by first exhausting him and making him hopeless of ever completing his quest. In this way, the Ring also represents the great burden of responsibly bearing power. Frodo bears the most powerful object in Middle-earth. He seeks to destroy it rather than wield it, yet simply wearing it around his neck takes a great toll. Frodo's deterioration into physical weakness and spiritual despondency the course of *The Two Towers* indicates that such dominating power can't be carried safely for long.



LEMBAS

Lembas, the wafer-like and highly nutritious bread given to the Fellowship as they left Lothlorien, symbolizes perseverance as well as physical, emotional, and spiritual sustenance. *Lembas* is intended to sustain travelers on long journeys. Accordingly, it strengthens Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas as they run for days on end in a hopeless pursuit of the orcs that kidnapped Merry and Pippin, enabling them to press on in spite of their despair and exhaustion. But it doesn't just renew their bodily strength—it also gives them mental respite,

reminding them of friends, laughter, and happier times. *Lembas* is also essential for Sam and Frodo's well-being as they journey through barren lands and the oppressive weight of Sauron's gaze. When their other food runs out and they have nothing else to keep them alive, they have *lembas* and its accompanying memories of home and old comforts. In its role of maintaining the spiritual health of the hobbits, *lembas* is reminiscent of the Christian Eucharist.

Sam, who understands the importance of food for emotional and mental health as well as simple physical sustenance, often urges Frodo to eat a little *lembas* when he feels particularly despairing. Gollum, who eats only raw flesh, hates the taste of *lembas*, finding it offensive in its connection to the elves and its association with goodness and happiness. In this way, the *lembas* also represents the hobbits' virtue and the refinements that separate them from Gollum and his more animalistic behavior. Sam, who has little trouble remembering the joy of home, becomes tired of eating only *lembas* until Gollum refuses it, and then finds himself once again appreciative of the taste. Sam, determined to get Frodo home at the end of his quest, carefully rations the *lembas*, planning to save it for when their need is most dire. He understands that once they leave Ithilien and enter Mordor, the bread—and the reminders of home and spiritual sustenance that it brings—will be scarce.



THE PHIAL

The phial that Galadriel gave Frodo symbolizes hope, clarity, and strength. The phial is filled with the water of Galadriel's fountain and contains the light of the star of Eärndil, treasured by the elves. On the journey into Mordor, Frodo often forgets that he carries the phial with him, instead sinking into depression and despair. Twice, after Frodo remembers the phial, it gives him hope and comfort, aiding him through a dangerous situation. When tempted to put on the **Ring** as the Wraith-king looks for him at Minas Morgul, the touch of the phial allows Frodo to briefly forget the Ring's compulsion and escape undetected. In this way, the phial acts as something to hold onto in times of emotional and mental struggle. Similarly, Sam reminds Frodo of the phial when the hobbits are cornered in Shelob's lair. Darkness recedes from the phial, frightening Shelob back and allowing the hobbits to clearly see their surroundings. As the phial's light brightens, hope overcomes Frodo, clearing his mind of dark thoughts and fear. It is noteworthy that it is Sam, who is optimistic than Frodo to as they near Mordor, who remembers the power of the phial when they're trapped in darkness.

Shelob returns almost immediately to attack the hobbits after Sam hides the light of the phial away. When Sam faces Shelob to protect Frodo, he is reminded again of the phial, "as if some remote voice had spoken," and brings it back out. The phial is a guiding light, wishing to be remembered and calming its

wielders' minds. It seems to give its wielder not only hope and clarity, but also the ability to access a collective power beyond what they would ordinarily be capable of. Sam, though he speaks no elvish, shouts out an unfamiliar incantation and hears the voices of elves. The phial shines even brighter for Sam than it did when carried by Frodo, fed by Sam's "indomitable spirit," his dedication to Frodo, and his capacity for hope and optimism. With the help of the phial, Sam sends Shelob fleeing injured into her lair. When Sam, believing Frodo to be dead, agonizes over what to do next, the phial's light shines over Frodo as though trying to guide Sam's choice. But eventually, Sam hides the phial away, rejecting both its clarity of sight and the hope that he might be able to stay with Frodo. With the light extinguished, and weighed down by the despair of the Ring, Sam makes the wrong choice and leaves Frodo behind.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Del Ray edition of *The Two Towers* published in 1986.


Book 3, Chapter 1 Quotes

●● Boromir opened his eyes and strove to speak. At last slow words came. 'I tried to take the Ring from Frodo,' he said. 'I am sorry. I have paid.' His glance strayed to his fallen enemies; twenty at least lay there. 'They have gone: the Halflings: the Orcs have taken them. I think they are not dead. Orcs bound them.' He paused and his eyes closed wearily. After a moment he spoke again.

'Farewell, Aragorn! Go to Minas Tirith and save my people! I have failed.'

Related Characters: Boromir (speaker), Aragorn, Frodo Baggins, Meriadoc "Merry" Brandybuck, Peregrin "Pippin" Took

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage (which picks up from the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring* when Boromir tries to take the Ring from Frodo), Aragorn finds Boromir dying in the wake of a battle with a company of orcs. Confessing his crime to Aragorn, Boromir calls his imminent death a just punishment. With Boromir's character, *The Two Towers*


complicates the series' previously straightforward understanding of the conflict between good and evil. That is, good and evil are not only fundamentally opposed forces at work in the world, but also conflicting forces within single individuals. Boromir, then, is neither wholly good nor wholly evil, but a flawed character, vulnerable to the corruption and fear which drives him to dishonorable choices.

After his attempt to take the Ring from Frodo, Boromir understands that he has profoundly "failed" to adhere to his own morals, to resist the temptation of the Ring, and, consequently, to defend Gondor. Now, only Aragorn, the virtuous inheritor of Gondor's past righteousness, can succeed where Boromir failed and preserve the declining kingdom. Boromir also fails to protect Merry and Pippin from capture, though his attempt to do so, prompted by his selfless love for them, ultimately redeems him. Despite his flaws and arrogance, Boromir's final generous act—motivated by his willingness to defend his loved ones at any cost, giving no thought to personal glory—proves he is a hero after all.

☞ 'Let me think!' said Aragorn. 'And now may I make a right choice, and change the evil fate of this unhappy day!' He stood silent for a moment. 'I will follow the Orcs,' he said at last. 'I would have guided Frodo into Mordor and gone with him to the end; but if I seek him now in the wilderness, I must abandon the captives to torment and death. My heart speaks clearly at last: the fate of the Bearer is in my hands no longer. The Company has played its part. Yet we that remain cannot forsake our companions while we have strength left. Come! We will go now. Leave all that can be spared behind! We will press on by day and dark!'

Related Characters: Aragorn (speaker), Frodo Baggins, Meriadoc "Merry" Brandybuck, Peregrin "Pippin" Took, Gimli, Legolas

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Aragorn is faced with the difficult decision of where to lead Gimli and Legolas following the breaking of the Fellowship and the death of Boromir. Sam and Frodo have traveled on towards Mordor on their own while Merry and Pippin have been kidnapped by orcs. Though he longs to

return to Gondor, Aragorn has a duty to lead the Fellowship—a duty that conflicts with itself now that the Fellowship has broken up, compelling him to choose whom he has the greater responsibility to protect. Though his initial goal was to escort Frodo and the Ring to Mordor, he eventually decides that he has a greater responsibility to Merry and Pippin, who are in imminent danger. This reevaluation of his responsibilities is painful, but Aragorn, devoted not only to *one* duty but to the concept of his duty as a changing ideal, withstands it.

Still, in agonizing over his decision, Aragorn nearly falls into despair. He feels initially that to choose one pair of hobbits is to betray or "abandon" the other. It is Aragorn's sense of purpose that finally shields him against his despair. His desire to act eventually prompts him to make his choice; to accept that his duty to Frodo is finished and that he has a continued and urgent responsibility to Merry and Pippin. Though his responsibilities burden him with the weight of an "evil" choice, it is those same responsibilities which enable him to persevere through his doubt and find hope for the future.

Book 3, Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ 'It is hard to be sure of anything among so many marvels. The world is all grown strange. Elf and dwarf in company walk in our daily fields; and folk speak with the Lady of the Wood and yet live; and the Sword comes back to war that was broken in the long ages ere the fathers of our fathers rode into the Mark! How shall a man judge what to do in such times?'

'As he has ever judged,' said Aragorn. 'Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house.'

Related Characters: Éomer, Aragorn (speaker), Legolas, Gimli, Galadriel

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Éomer speaks with Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli on the fields of Rohan after the Rohirrim destroy the orc company. Éomer, awed by the "marvels" Aragorn mentions, recognizes the sudden complication of the world during the return of Sauron and the approach of war. He correctly understands that, in such complex times, the forces of good and evil become more difficult to neatly



categorize and distinguish. He views the world's increasing complexity as a return to hazy past ages of Middle-earth, which he assumes was ruled by different logic, unfathomable to his own time.


Aragorn argues that no matter what happens in the world around him, Éomer's responsibility as a citizen of that world hasn't changed—as always, he must judge for himself what is right and wrong or good and evil. The strangeness and unfamiliarity of walking legends is not an excuse for a lack of proper judgement or action. The rules of the world, and the moral laws governing its people, haven't changed just because of the sudden appearance of heroes. Aragorn, accustomed to legendary people and decisive in identifying good and evil, discounts the fact that the complication of the world makes it more difficult for everyday people to discern their duty. Still, though he oversimplifies the moral struggle of the common man, Aragorn is right. Evil hasn't changed since the Second Age—Sauron is back with the same bid for power—and all the people of Middle-earth are bound together to oppose him.

Book 3, Chapter 3 Quotes

☞☞ 'Now,' thought Pippin, 'if only it takes that ugly fellow a little while to get his troops under control, I've got a chance.' A gleam of hope had come to him.

Related Characters: Peregrin "Pippin" Took (speaker), Uglúk, Grishnákh

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis



This passage occurs after the orc company has captured Merry and Pippin. The Isengard orcs and the Northern orcs argue among themselves, resulting in a fight that leaves a dead orc still holding his knife near where Pippin lies. Their fight is over power; the Isengard orcs, loyal to Saruman, want to bring the hobbits (who they believe are carrying the Ring) to Isengard, while the Northerners, led by Grishnákh, distrust Saruman and prefer to take the hobbits directly to Sauron. The Ring has incredible power, and only one of them, between Sauron and Saruman, can possess it—power, as they understand it, can't be shared. The orcs' belligerence and their struggle for power distracts them, allowing Pippin the opportunity to cut the ropes around his


wrists and free himself.

Though apparently working together towards the same goal of transporting the hobbits, the orcs constantly plot against each other and abandon their duty. They are weakened by their lack of collaboration, by their ignorance of other ideas of power, and by their underestimation of the hobbits, and their goals consequently fail. Besides allowing Merry and Pippin the opportunity to eventually escape them, the orcs' constant betrayal also exemplifies the difference between the hobbits, who work together and support each other, and their enemies. It is the hobbits who eventually win the day, safely evading the orcs with craft and collaboration, while the orcs, doomed to die in battle with the Rohirrim, can't properly unite even to fight their enemies.

☞☞ The cakes were broken, but good, still in their leaf-wrappings. The hobbits each ate two or three pieces. The taste brought back to them the memory of fair faces, and laughter, and wholesome food in quiet days now far away. For a while they ate thoughtfully, sitting in the dark, heedless of the cries and sounds of the battle nearby.

Related Characters: Meriadoc "Merry" Brandybuck, Peregrin "Pippin" Took

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the hobbits, weakened from their forced march with the orcs, stop briefly at the edge of the orcs' battle against the Rohirrim to fortify themselves with *lembas*, the bread given to them by the elves. The elven bread doesn't simply feed them and strengthen their bodies, but also calms and fortifies their minds, emphasizing the importance of mental and spiritual wellbeing. Even after facing down their imminent death, the *lembas* allows them to escape from their present moment and remember kinder times. This is both an attribute of the *lembas* itself, imbued with elf magic, and of wholesome food in general, which all hobbits cherish.

Amidst the threat of the approaching war, the characters of *The Two Towers* find ways to cope with and overcome their fear and despair. The hobbits find joy in small comforts such as good food and comfortable rest. In a time of war, in which their enemy uses despair as a weapon against them, the

hobbits' capacity for optimism is invaluable to them and their allies.

Book 3, Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ ‘He was polite in those days, always asking my leave (at least when he met me); and always eager to listen. I told him many things that he would never have found out by himself; but he never repaid me in like kind. I cannot remember that he ever told me anything. And he got more and more like that; his face, as I remember it—I have not seen it for many a day—became like windows in a stone wall: windows with shutters inside.

‘I think that I now understand what he is up to. He is plotting to become a Power. He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment.’

Related Characters: Treebeard (speaker), Saruman, Meriadoc “Merry” Brandybuck, Peregrin “Pippin” Took

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 75-76

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Treebeard describes Saruman's corruption to Merry and Pippin. Saruman's decline into evil and discourtesy parallels the decline of the world of Middle-earth from its former beauty and righteousness to its current state of environmental and moral decay. Saruman's behavior towards Treebeard and his treatment of the land around Isengard are indicators of his morality—as he is corrupted “more and more” by evil, he in turn corrupts the natural world, abusing and exploiting the land under his care.

Treebeard understands Saruman's corruption in terms of his relationship with and likeness to nature. Saruman's desire for absolute power—and to actually “become a Power”—twists his mind, blinding him to everything but his own goals. He no longer finds beauty in the natural world, or thinks about it at all, except to consider how he might use it. The more Saruman grew to be like “windows in a stone wall,” the more dishonorable he became. Now, Saruman has “a mind of metal and wheels”—he is inherently opposed to nature, consumed by and representing the dangers of mechanization which pollute the world and spread evil. He doesn't only use metal and wheels to increase his power, but also becomes like them himself.

☞ ‘Of course, it is likely enough, my friends,’ he said slowly, ‘likely enough that we are going to our doom: the last march of the Ents. But if we stayed at home and did nothing, doom would find us anyway, sooner or later. [...] Now at least the last march of the Ents may be worth a song. Aye,’ he sighed, ‘we may help the other peoples before we pass away.’

Related Characters: Treebeard (speaker), Peregrin “Pippin” Took, Meriadoc “Merry” Brandybuck

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, which Treebeard says to Merry and Pippin as the ents march to attack Isengard, exemplifies the sense of loss and decay that pervades *The Two Towers*. There is an end approaching the people of Middle-earth, and many of them recognize it. Treebeard knows that the decline of the world's natural beauty and goodness is leading towards something that will find the ents “sooner or later.” Rather than prolong their lives and simply wait for that day to arrive, the ents decide to risk everything to fight against the world's slow decay.

The ents explain multiple times that they are slow creatures and slow to action; they don't like to be roused. Still, they rouse themselves for the sake of Middle-earth. Their devotion to their duty as shepherds of the growing things of the world demands that they fight back against a threat such as Saruman, who hoards power and abuses the land.


The ents' motivation is unselfish—Treebeard admits that they're likely marching to their “doom” and the end of their entire race. Still, by attacking Isengard, they hope to strike a blow against the forces hastening Middle-earth's decline and in some way help the other races with their sacrifice. It's possible that the ents will be immortalized through song even after their deaths, but that doesn't factor into their motivation. Treebeard wishes to make an impact and do some good for the world, and, in that way, be *worthy* of a song, whether or not anyone actually hears about the last march of the Ents.

Book 3, Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ ‘You have not said what you know or guess, Aragorn, my friend,’ he said quietly. ‘Poor Boromir! I could not see what happened to him. It was a sore trial for such a man: a warrior, and a lord of men. Galadriel told me that he was in peril. But he escaped in the end. I am glad. It was not in vain that the young hobbits came with us, if only for Boromir's sake.’

Related Characters: Gandalf (speaker), Boromir, Peregrin “Pippin” Took, Meriadoc “Merry” Brandybuck, Aragorn, Gimli, Legolas

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Gandalf, while speaking to Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas in Fangorn forest, expresses his relief that Boromir was able to avoid being completely corrupted by the Ring before he died. Once again, Boromir’s character, flawed, corruptible, and neither purely good nor purely evil, complicates the morality of Middle-earth, which tends to align characters on the side of either good or evil in the outright conflict for control of the world. Gandalf and Galadriel both witness the struggle between good and evil occurring within Boromir and notice his “peril”—the danger that the Ring will overpower and corrupt him. Though Gandalf knows that Boromir gave in to temptation and attempted to steal the Ring from Frodo, he still affirms that Boromir “escaped” his great peril.


Ultimately, Boromir’s love for the hobbits saves him from himself. Though Boromir falters, frightening Frodo and driving him away, he redeems himself by sacrificing his life while defending Merry and Pippin. With that selfless act of heroism, Gandalf believes, Boromir turned the tide on the battle within himself, rejected evil, and chose good, avoiding the peril of true greed and corruption. Had Boromir been entirely lost to the Ring, he couldn’t have defended the hobbits, an act of pure kindness and generosity. The hobbits save Boromir unwittingly, with their innocence and optimism, by providing him with someone to love and protect to the point of self-denial and self-sacrifice.

☞ ‘I have spoken words of hope. But only of hope. Hope is not victory. War is upon us and all our friends, a war in which only the use of the Ring could give us surety of victory. It fills me with great sorrow and great fear: for much shall be destroyed and all may be lost. I am Gandalf, Gandalf the White, but Black is mightier still.’

He rose and gazed out eastward, shading his eyes, as if he saw things far away that none of them could see. Then he shook his head. ‘No,’ he said in a soft voice, ‘it has gone beyond our reach. Of that at least let us be glad. We can no longer be tempted to use the Ring. We must go down to face a peril near despair, yet that deadly peril is removed.’

Related Characters: Gandalf (speaker), Sauron, Frodo Baggins, Aragorn, Gimli, Legolas

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 108-109

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Gandalf describes the odds of the coming war with Sauron to Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas. Even in despair, there is reason to hope. The fight for Middle-earth will be difficult and costly, but Gandalf assures his friends that, with their shared convictions and unselfish desire to protect the world, victory is possible. Gandalf, like many others, is aware of the ways in which Middle-earth has already declined from its former glory and predicts more destruction to come. Sauron has no love or respect for Middle-earth, and in his attempt to conquer it, he will also irreparably damage it. The forces allied against Sauron, who wish to preserve and restore the world, must do so in a manner that aligns with their values and their idea of power.

Though Gandalf and his allies know the corrupting power of the Ring and understand why it must be destroyed, the temptation to use it is still strong. To use the Ring to fight Sauron would be the easy choice—a guaranteed victory—but the wrong one. Such absolute power can’t be wielded to any good end and would only perpetuate Sauron’s evil and corruption. Now that the Ring, and the temptation to use it, is gone with Frodo, one “deadly peril” to their cause is out of reach. Still, the side of good is at a distinct disadvantage and, because of it, what they seek to protect may be completely destroyed.

Book 3, Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ ‘The end will not be long,’ said the king. ‘But I will not end here, taken like an old badger in a trap. Snowmane and Hasufel and the horses of my guard are in the inner court. When dawn comes, I will bid them sound the Helm’s horn, and I will ride forth. Will you ride with me then, son of Arathorn? Maybe we shall cleave a road, or make such an end as will be worth a song—if any be left to sing of us hereafter.’

‘I will ride with you,’ said Aragorn.

Related Characters: Théoden, Aragorn (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 156

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs during the battle of Helm's Deep, when the orcs breach the walls and Théoden takes shelter in the tower. The men of Rohan are greatly outnumbered by the orcs, and Théoden plans for this charge to be their final stand, win or die. While they battle the orcs, the characters must each fight their own internal battles with fear and hopelessness. The odds look bleak for them, and there is little hope of reinforcements, though Aragorn waits for the dawn and Gandalf's promised return.

Théoden turns to action in the face of despair. He can't bear to sit idly while the fortress is under attack, and rather than attempting to convince him to wait for Gandalf's return, Aragorn agrees to join the final charge. Aragorn has faith in Gandalf, but he, like Théoden, would rather take action than wait, relying on his sense of purpose to help him through the night.

Théoden, like many others in *The Two Towers*, invokes the idea of his final act being memorialized in song. In doing so, he doesn't attempt to motivate Aragorn to join him with the reward of fame. Rather, he distracts himself and bolsters his own courage by imagining for himself a death that means or accomplishes enough that it *could* be made into a song. He hopes to be worthy of such an honor, even though that worthiness will never result in glory since, as he knows, it's unlikely that any witnesses of the charge will survive to sing about it.

Book 3, Chapter 8 Quotes

☛☛ 'Songs we have that tell of these things, but we are forgetting them, teaching them only to children, as a careless custom. And now the songs have come down among us out of strange places, and walk visible under the Sun.'

'You should be glad, Théoden King,' said Gandalf. 'For not only the little life of Men is now endangered, but the life also of those things which you have deemed the matter of legend. You are not without allies, even if you know them not.'

'Yet I should also be sad,' said Théoden. 'For however the fortune of war shall go, may it not so end that much that was fair and wonderful shall pass for ever out of Middle-earth?'

'It may,' said Gandalf. 'The evil of Sauron cannot be wholly cured, nor made as if it had not been. But to such days we are doomed. Let us now go on with the journey we have begun!'

Related Characters: Théoden, Gandalf (speaker), Sauron

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 168-169

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after Gandalf, Théoden, and their allies pass through the forest of huorns that appears suddenly outside of Helm's Deep. Though the sight of the ents brings Théoden joy and gives Gandalf hope for the coming war, it also reminds Théoden of the destruction still to come, partially due to how mankind has failed the rest of Middle-earth by becoming forgetful, idle, and negligent. He recognizes that his people's careless custom of discounting old legends as merely children's stories is another way that Rohan has declined from its former wisdom and greatness.


While Gandalf emphasizes the benefits of uniting Middle-earth against Sauron and of the ents fighting on the side of men, Théoden—though minutes before he thought ents were only a legend—is faced with their likely destruction. A war with Sauron won't just mean the deaths of many men, but also the loss of "much that was fair and wonderful" about their world. If legends are real, they can aid in the fight against Sauron, but they can also be destroyed by him. In recognizing their reality, Théoden must contend with their loss.

Gandalf admits that, even if their allies defeat Sauron and prevent him from causing the world's further decay, and even if Middle-earth unites to heal the damage, there is no way to restore it perfectly or to completely erase the harm that's been done. Still, it is their duty to try.

Book 3, Chapter 10 Quotes

☛☛ 'Yes, when you also have the Keys of Barad-dûr itself, I suppose; and the crowns of seven kings, and the rods of the Five Wizards, and have purchased yourself a pair of boots many sizes larger than those you wear now. A modest plan. Hardly one in which my help is needed! I have other things to do. Do not be a fool. If you wish to treat with me, while you have a chance, go away, and come back when you are sober!'

Related Characters: Saruman (speaker), Gandalf

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Gandalf confronts Saruman in his tower and offers him the chance to leave freely if he hands over his wizard's staff to be returned later, but Saruman accuses Gandalf of wanting to take his power for himself. Saruman only understands power as something absolute, for a single person to hoard. When Gandalf requests Saruman's staff to prevent him from harming the world further, Saruman can only assume that Gandalf wants to use it and eventually wield the power of all the wizards, as Saruman himself would in Gandalf's place. He can't conceive of wanting to avoid or destroy despotic power, just as Sauron would never expect the men of the West to try to destroy the Ring.

Like Boromir, Saruman has been corrupted by external influence: Sauron, speaking to him through a *palantír*. Unlike Boromir, however, Saruman has no desire to turn away from his corruption and return to righteousness. Saruman betrayed Middle-earth by aiding Sauron, then betrayed Sauron in seeking the Ring and its power for himself. When Gandalf offers him the opportunity to change, Saruman rejects it, both unwilling to give up his bid for power and unable to accept that Gandalf's motives are selfless.

torture in person. Sauron's arrogance and cruelty lead him to miss a vital opportunity—if he had taken the chance to talk to Pippin, he would certainly have learned the location of the Ring.

Pippin, in this instance, is much like Boromir: a flawed character and a victim of a powerfully seductive object. Pippin is young and foolish, and his curiosity leads him to almost bring about Sauron's victory and the subjugation of the world. Despite this, and though he knows stealing the *palantír* is wrong, he isn't evil. And though Pippin's intentions and actions are overwhelmingly moral as he seeks to defend Middle-earth from the forces of Mordor, nor is he purely good. His mistakes, like Boromir's, create a murky middle ground in the battle between the pure evil of Sauron and the pure good of characters like Gandalf. It is his overall character and his patterns of behavior, rather than his mistakes, which characterize him as a certainly imperfect yet ultimately heroic character.

Though Pippin's actions are similar to Boromir's, Pippin pays less dearly. Boromir dies almost immediately after his transgression and considers it a just punishment. Pippin receives punishment enough in his conversation with Sauron. Once he's safe, and with Gandalf's kind consolation, he recovers quickly from his ordeal.

Book 3, Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ 'All right!' he said, 'Say no more! You have taken no harm. There is no lie in your eyes, as I had feared. But he did not speak long with you. A fool, but an honest fool, you remain, Peregrin Took. Wiser ones might have done worse in such a pass. But mark this! You have been saved, and all your friends too, mainly by good fortune, as it is called. You cannot count on it a second time. If he had questioned you, then and there, almost certainly you would have told all that you know, to the ruin of us all. But he was too eager. [...] But come! I forgive you. Be comforted! Things have not turned out as evilly as they might.'

Related Characters: Gandalf (speaker), Peregrin "Pippin" Took, Sauron

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Gandalf scolds Pippin for stealing the *palantír* and looking into it (which allowed Sauron to see into his mind), then assures him that no real harm was done. Though Pippin knows vital information about Frodo's quest, Gandalf's return, and their allies' plans, Sauron doesn't interrogate him about any of it. Instead, he gloats and hurts Pippin for fun, assuming that Pippin is at Isengard with Saruman and can soon be brought to Mordor for Sauron to


Book 4, Chapter 1 Quotes


☝☝ *I do not feel any pity for Gollum. He deserves death.*

Deserves death! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give that to them? Then be not too eager to deal out death in the name of justice, fearing for your own safety. Even the wise cannot see all ends.

'Very well,' he answered aloud, lowering his sword. 'But still I am afraid. And yet, as you see, I will not touch the creature. For now that I see him, I do pity him.'

Related Characters: Frodo Baggins, Gandalf (speaker), Gollum (Sméagol), Samwise "Sam" Gamgee

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 246

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, which takes place when Frodo and Sam capture Gollum on the way to Mordor, refers back to a conversation between Frodo and Gandalf in *The Fellowship*

of the Ring. This moment marks a change in Frodo, from his previous callousness about Gollum's life to his increasing pity and mercy. Bearing the Ring and feeling the burden of its weight and temptation enables Frodo to better understand how Gollum feels and what he faces. Though their shared experience with the Ring ties them together, Frodo fears Gollum, who is emblematic of everything that he himself could become under the Ring's extended influence. Still, despite his fear, Frodo chooses to show Gollum mercy and takes him on as another of his many responsibilities.

Gandalf's advice to Frodo is about concepts of power; though Frodo has the power to kill Gollum, he shouldn't be eager to use or abuse it. That kind of ultimate power to "deal out death" and judge who is worthy of it is the unjust power Sauron seeks. Following Gandalf's advice, Frodo decides to use his power over Gollum to protect him and take him under his care rather than harm him. This idea of power, used to defend rather than oppress, aligns with that of the Fellowship and their allies.

Book 4, Chapter 2 Quotes



☞☞ 'About the food,' said Sam. 'How long's it going to take us to do this job?'

[...]

'I don't know how long we shall take to—to finish,' said Frodo. 'We were miserably delayed in the hills. But Samwise Gamgee, my dear hobbit—indeed, Sam my dearest hobbit, friend of friends—I do not think we need to give thought to what comes after that. To do the job as you put it—what hope is there that we ever shall? And if we do, who knows what will come of that? If the One goes into the Fire, and we are at hand? I ask you, Sam, are we ever likely to need bread again?'

Related Characters: Samwise "Sam" Gamgee, Frodo Baggins (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 257

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sam, concerned about their dwindling supply of *lembas*, asks Frodo how long it will take them to travel to Mordor, destroy the Ring, and return. Frodo doubts that it matters, convinced that the quest to destroy

the Ring, even if they succeed, will likely kill them in the process. The land around them grows more inhospitable the closer they travel to Mordor. Mordor itself doesn't support life and will eventually kill them—Sam and Frodo are knowingly walking towards their deaths.

Still, their commitment to their duty drives them forward. Frodo is devoted to completing his quest—or at least to *trying*, even to the point of death—and Sam is devoted to caring for Frodo. These responsibilities, while incredibly difficult, are so inherently worth doing that Sam and Frodo will risk their lives for even the chance of success. Duty is often hard, and theirs is particularly dangerous; both must also contend with the knowledge that they likely won't return from Mordor and the despair and hopelessness that comes with that.

Frodo finds solace in his determination—he has to do what he has to do, no matter the difficulty or consequence—but Sam never quite loses hope that they might make it out. His job is to take care of Frodo, and he makes plans to do so as they travel, rationing their remaining *lembas* and still pondering the problem of their food. His unassailable capacity for hope and optimism saves him from the crushing depression Frodo bears and enables him to aim for a future Frodo doubts.


☞☞ 'No, no! Not that way!' wailed Sméagol.

'Yes! We wants it! We wants it!'

Each time that the second thought spoke, Gollum's long hand crept out slowly, pawing towards Frodo, and then was drawn back with a jerk as Sméagol spoke again. Finally both arms, with long fingers flexed and twitching, clawed towards his neck.

Related Characters: Gollum (Sméagol) (speaker), Sauron, Frodo Baggins, Samwise "Sam" Gamgee

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 268

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sam watches quietly as Gollum holds a conversation with himself, broken up into two distinct personalities who argue about what to do about the Ring. As the world of Middle-earth is split between the warring forces of good and evil, so too is Gollum split. He is the clearest example of how good and evil struggle for control within individuals, as the forces of good and evil within him

manifest as different people entirely: people with different voices, different desires, and different physical actions. When one speaks, it takes control of the single body both voices possess, reaching out to take the Ring or snatching his hands away.


Sméagol, the kinder voice, wants to be loyal to Frodo and fends off the bribes and threats of Gollum, the voice that hates Frodo and wants the Ring. The second voice, Gollum, speaks for the Ring, trying to tempt Sméagol into stealing it. The Ring is a force of pure desire; when Sméagol is insistent upon his loyalty to Frodo, though Gollum tries several different incentives to convince him to take the Ring, Gollum's only defense is "We wants it!" This voice desires the kind of ultimate power that Sauron and Saruman also want and, in its child-like tantrum, reveals the ultimate selfishness and immaturity of seeking such power.

Book 4, Chapter 3 Quotes

☝☝ 'It was an evil fate. But he had taken it on himself in his own sitting-room in the far-off spring of another year, so remote now that it was like a chapter in a story of the world's youth, when the Trees of Silver and Gold were still in bloom. This was an evil choice. Which way should he choose? And if both led to terror and death, what good lay in choice?'

Related Characters: Frodo Baggins (speaker), Gollum (Sméagol), Samwise "Sam" Gamgee

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 281

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Frodo sits outside the Black Gate which leads to Mordor, paralyzed with indecision. He must get into Mordor to destroy the Ring, but the Black Gate is heavily guarded, and the alternate route that Gollum proposes might not be any better; he doesn't know which way to go. Frodo's duty to destroy the Ring and his responsibility for its safety during the journey forces him to make difficult choices. This one seems to him like a trap; there's no good answer, yet he is compelled by his duty to make a decision that will influence the fate of the world. If he makes the wrong choice and the Ring is captured, there will be no hope for Middle-earth in the coming war against Sauron.



Frodo's fear and despair prevent him from making the necessary decision for several hours. The quest feels

hopeless, and the choice pointless. Frodo fears he'll fail no matter what he does. Ultimately, it is Sam who jolts Frodo out of his depression by reciting a silly poem, emphasizing the importance of joy and lightheartedness as a shield against the powerful despair of Mordor. Momentarily freed from his pessimism, and compelled by his devotion to his quest, Frodo is able to make the choice to follow Gollum and continue on the path towards Mordor. There's no way to know if he's chosen correctly, but the important thing is that he *made* a choice—that he's still moving forward towards his goal and doing his best to carry the responsibility he undertook back in the Shire, even if he regrets it now.

Book 4, Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ Gollum disappeared. He was away some time, and Frodo after a few mouthfuls of *lembas* settled deep into the brown fern and went to sleep. Sam looked at him. [...] Frodo's face was peaceful, the marks of fear and care had left it; but it looked old, old and beautiful, as if the chiseling of the shaping years was now revealed in many fine lines that had before been hidden, though the identity of the face was not changed. Not that Sam Gamgee put it that way to himself. He shook his head, as if finding words useless, and murmured: 'I love him.'

Related Characters: Samwise "Sam" Gamgee (speaker), Frodo Baggins, Gollum (Sméagol)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 291

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place in Ithilien, a surprisingly green land near Mordor, when Sam sends Gollum off to find food and watches over Frodo as he sleeps. Though *The Two Towers* often portrays duty as difficult, burdensome, and even painful, Sam's deep love for Frodo makes his duty lighter than most in some ways. Though it is a hardship to travel into danger through perilous lands, Sam's dedication to Frodo is natural to him. Unlike Frodo, who struggles with doubt and despair while carrying the Ring, Sam has no desire to do other than what he's doing in following and caring for Frodo.

Similarly, while Frodo finds it difficult to be hopeful about the quest, find simple joy in his day, and remember the comforts of home while traveling towards Mordor, these things come naturally to Sam. He has incredible faith in Frodo and a great capacity for hope, joy, and optimism. Though he's frequently grumpy and suspicious of Gollum, Sam's ability to see beauty in the world—and in Frodo—is an


essential skill for survival in the lands around Mordor. Because of it, he is able to provide Frodo with lightness and happiness in his greatest moments of despair and remain calm and level-headed enough to care for their practical needs. While Frodo understands the importance of his duty to destroy the Ring, Sam takes actual joy in his duty of protecting Frodo, feeding him, and making him feel less alone.

Book 4, Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ ‘Not were Minas Tirith falling in ruin and I alone could save her, so, using the weapon of the Dark Lord for her good and my glory. No, I do not wish for such triumphs, Frodo son of Drogo. [...] War must be, while we defend our lives against a destroyer who would devour all; but I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend: the city of the Men of Númenor; and I would have her loved for her memory, her ancience, her beauty, and her present wisdom.’

Related Characters: Faramir (speaker), Sauron, Frodo Baggins, Isildur

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 314

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faramir, though he doesn't know that Isildur's Bane is the One Ring, assures Frodo that he has no desire for the power Isildur's Bane would give him and no love for war. Faramir understands both that Middle-earth is in a decline from its former nobility and that Sauron is likely to hasten that decline and bring the world to ruin. Still, he recognizes, as his brother Boromir couldn't, that to use Sauron's concept of dominating power to defeat him wouldn't do the world any good and would only perpetuate violence and domination. Thus this speech is a direct rebuttal of Boromir's rationalization for trying to steal the Ring to save Gondor; even to save his nation, Faramir wouldn't use power in such a way.

Faramir understands power as something to be used only for the defense of people and ideals, not for triumph or glory. While he accepts war as a necessity in fighting against tyranny, he doesn't seek it out for any other reason. If he loved war and fought for the purpose of glory, he implies, he would be neither honorable nor heroic. Faramir values and



exemplifies the old nobility of his country, before its slow decline. His heroism in war is a means to an end and nothing more. His simple explanation—that he loves what he defends, not the war itself or anything he might take from it—portrays him as truly heroic.



Book 4, Chapter 7 Quotes

☝☝ ‘I'm afraid our journey's drawing to an end.’

‘Maybe,’ said Sam; ‘but *where there's life there's hope*, as my Gaffer used to say; *and need of vittles*, as he mostways used to add. You have a bite, Mr. Frodo, and then a bit of sleep.’

Related Characters: Frodo Baggins, Samwise “Sam” Gamgee (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 348-349

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after Sam, Frodo, and Gollum part ways with Faramir on the way to Gollum's secret path into Mordor. Bowed by the oppressive gaze of Sauron who hunts for him and fighting the Ring's compulsion, Frodo is frequently listless and depressed as they near Mordor. He remains convinced that his efforts to destroy the Ring will mean their death. Rather than concerning himself with the future of the quest, however, Sam focuses solely on his task of caring for Frodo.

Sam recognizes the importance of things like food, sleep, comfort, and the memory of home in a place that seeks to wear them down with despair. Hobbits place great value in these creature comforts like food and sleep, which, though they may seem like meager solace from the troubles plaguing the world, are essential and fundamental basics of health and happiness. The hobbits' deep appreciation for comfort reveals a reverence for the simple joys of life, and Sam's insistence upon providing them for Frodo is an insistence both on Frodo's continued survival and his spiritual resilience. Sam is invaluable to Frodo on the journey to Mordor, not only because he takes care of his practical needs while Frodo wages an internal battle against the Ring's temptation, but also because he tends to Frodo's emotional and spiritual wellbeing by providing him with nourishment, company, and encouragement.

Book 4, Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ ‘All is lost. Even if my errand is performed, no one will ever know. There will be no one I can tell. It will be in vain.’
Overcome with weakness he wept. And still the host of Morgul crossed the bridge.


Then, at a great distance, as if it came out of memories of the Shire, some sunlit early morning, when the day called and the doors were opening, he heard Sam’s voice speaking. ‘Wake up, Mr. Frodo! Wake up!’

[...]

Frodo raised his head, and then stood up. Despair had not left him, but the weakness had passed. He even smiled grimly, feeling now as clearly as a moment before he had felt the opposite, that what he had to do, he had to do, if he could, and that whether Faramir or Aragorn or Elrond or Galadriel or Gandalf or anyone else ever knew about it was beside the purpose.

Related Characters: Frodo Baggins, Samwise “Sam” Gamgee (speaker), The Wraith-king, Faramir, Aragorn, Elrond, Galadriel, Gandalf

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 357-358

Explanation and Analysis



This passage occurs as Frodo watches an enormous army led by the Wraith-king depart from Minas Morgul towards Gondor. Realizing that the army is only a small part of Sauron’s forces, Frodo sinks suddenly into hopelessness, fearing that Sauron will conquer the world before he can destroy the Ring. He fears decimation of the world for its own sake, but also because of the idea that, if everyone is dead, no one will be left to remember him. No one will comfort him or acknowledge his pain at the end of the long, terrifying road to Mordor. His many struggles will have accomplished nothing. Though Frodo wasn’t motivated to undertake the quest by any promise of glory at its end, especially since the quest was kept a secret, he now loses even the vague hope of someone he loves recognizing his sacrifice.

As always, it’s Sam who pulls Frodo from his despair. Hearing Sam’s voice is a comfort and a reminder of home, giving Frodo the strength he requires to rally. After taking his moment of grief to mourn how the end of the world will impact him, he remembers the inherent value of his quest

and resolves to see it through to the end. The promise of recognition is comforting—and would imply the success of his quest and the survival of his friends—but not necessary. With its loss, he can still go on and continue to Mordor.

☞ ‘Yes, that’s so,’ said Sam. ‘And we shouldn’t be here at all, if we’d known more about it before we started. But I suppose it’s often that way. The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures, as I used to call them. I used to think that they were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of sport, as you might say. But that’s not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually—their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn’t.’

Related Characters: Samwise “Sam” Gamgee (speaker), Frodo Baggins

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 362

Explanation and Analysis

As they near Gollum’s secret path into Mordor, Sam and Frodo converse about stories and the place of a hero in them. Sam figures that, like them, heroes from stories don’t actually go looking for adventures, but simply fall into them and make commitments to see necessary tasks through. This understanding of quests implies that true heroism requires necessity. Heroism, in “the tales that really mattered,” aren’t prompted by a desire for glory or excitement, but by accident and true need.

Sam has realized that tasks such as theirs aren’t enviable things. No one in their right mind would choose to undertake such a quest—they devote themselves to finishing it once they find themselves already in the story. Sam and Frodo themselves would likely have avoided taking on the responsibility of the Ring if they’d known everything they would face on the way. But, though Frodo and Sam did have many opportunities to turn back, they freely and continually choose not to because of their devotion to their duty—Frodo’s duty to the world and Sam’s duty to Frodo. This devotion, more than any exciting deeds, is what makes them heroic.

“Why, Sam,” he said, “to hear you somehow makes me as merry as if the story was already written. But you’ve left out one of the chief characters: Samwise the stouthearted. “I want to hear more about Sam, dad. Why didn’t they put in more of his talk, dad? That’s what I like, it makes me laugh. And Frodo wouldn’t have got far without Sam, would he, dad?”

“No, Mr. Frodo,” said Sam, “you shouldn’t make fun. I was serious.”

“So was I,” said Frodo, “and so I am.”

Related Characters: Samwise “Sam” Gamgee, Frodo Baggins (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 363-364

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sam and Frodo continue their discussion of stories and heroism. Sam wonders if the two of them will ever be put into stories in the future. He hopes that Frodo will be remembered for his deeds and believes that Frodo deserves any glory that might wait for him at home. Sam is a humble working-class hobbit, motivated entirely by his love for Frodo, and doesn’t believe he has much of a place in the story at all. Though he has no trouble recognizing Frodo’s heroism, Sam doesn’t notice his own and doesn’t seek any glory for himself.

In this passage, also, Frodo recognizes both the importance of Sam’s joy and imagination amidst the despair of their journey and his well-deserved place as a principal character. Frodo feels transported by it, “merry as if the story was already written.” He admits that he wouldn’t have gotten far without Sam, and in doing so he doesn’t reference Sam’s care in ensuring that they eat and sleep. Rather, he mentions Sam’s “talk”: his stout heart, his talent for conversation, his jokes, his poems, and his ability to make Frodo laugh is life-saving medicine in their desolate travels. Though his care for Frodo’s physical health is important, his attention to Frodo’s emotional needs is his most important service.

Book 4, Chapter 10 Quotes


“Even as Sam himself crouched, looking at her, seeing his death in her eyes, a thought came to him, as if some remote voice had spoken, and he fumbled in his breast with his left hand, and found what he sought: cold and hard and solid it seemed to his touch in a phantom world of horror, the Phial of Galadriel.

[...]

As if his indomitable spirit had set its potency in motion, the glass blazed suddenly like a white torch in his hand.

Related Characters: Samwise “Sam” Gamgee, Galadriel, Shelob

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 382-383

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sam faces down the giant spider Shelob to protect Frodo who lies paralyzed on the ground. In attacking, Sam is motivated not by any promise of glory or renown, but by simple need and by his desire to protect Frodo above anything else, even at risk of his own life. Sam has a duty to take care of Frodo—his role as a member of the Fellowship—but, more importantly, he has a *desire* to protect him that goes beyond any duty and is driven by love. His act of facing Shelob is truly heroic, not because he injures a powerful ancient creature that no hero has ever before wounded, but because it is prompted by his truly unselfish desire to defend his loved one—the model of a just and noble use of power.

Sam’s optimism serves him well in his fight against Shelob. His ability to recall the light and goodness of other times and places while trapped in darkness enables him to remember the existence of the phial and call out its light. His “indomitable spirit” fuels the phial, which glows even brighter than it did for Frodo who is wearied, weakened, and pessimistic after his long travels. Sam’s incredible capacity for hope is manifested as a light that drives Shelob back and saves their lives.

“What shall I do, what shall I do?” he said. “Did I come all this way with him for nothing?” And then he remembered his own voice speaking words that at the time he did not understand himself, at the beginning of their journey: *I have something to do before the end. I must see it through, sir, if you understand.*

Related Characters: Samwise “Sam” Gamgee (speaker), Frodo Baggins

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 385

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs just after Sam defeats Shelob and returns to Frodo’s body to find him unresponsive and apparently dead. With Frodo gone, Sam is completely directionless. His duty, which has always been to care for Frodo, is now lost to him. Grieving, he wonders what to do and searches for a purpose. Sam knows that he has “something to do before the end,” but he doesn’t understand what that something is, any more than he understood it then. Like Frodo at the Black Gate, Sam is faced with an agonizing decision. In the absence of his own duty, he finds Frodo’s—the responsibility of bearing the Ring now falls to him. Still, he longs to stay with Frodo, and even considers killing himself to avoid facing Mordor without him.

Sam’s optimism finally fails him; he has no further shield against the crushing hopelessness of Mordor. Lacking Frodo, his sole motivation, Sam falls into despair that fuels his indecision. Then, it is ultimately Sam’s love for Frodo that prompts him to stand, take up the Ring, and resolve to complete Frodo’s quest. There is no other choice that would honor Frodo’s life and make his death meaningful, and nothing else can prompt him to leave Frodo unburied. Though Sam makes the difficult choice that Frodo’s duty demands of him and that he believes to be right, his heart rebels against leaving Frodo’s side.


He flung the Quest and all his decisions away, and fear and doubt with them. He knew now where his place was and had been: at his master’s side, though what he could do there was not clear. Back he ran down the steps, down the path towards Frodo.

[...]

‘I wonder if any song will ever mention it: How Samwise fell in the High Pass and made a wall of bodies round his master. No, no song. Of course not, for the Ring’ll be found, and there’ll be no more songs. I can’t help it. My place is by Mr. Frodo. They must understand that—Elrond and the Council, and the great Lords and Ladies with all their wisdom. Their plans have gone wrong. I can’t be their Ring-bearer. Not without Mr. Frodo.’

Related Characters: Samwise “Sam” Gamgee (speaker), Frodo Baggins, Elrond

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 390

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sam decides to run back to defend Frodo’s body from the approaching orcs, despite the fact that he believes it will mean the end of the quest and the capture of the Ring. In doing so, he essentially accepts the destruction of the world as he knows it. When Sauron gets the Ring, the Free Peoples allied against him will have no chance of preventing him from taking complete power over Middle-earth. In contrast to his initial decision to leave Frodo, now Sam is led by his heart rather than his head. Unlike Aragorn, who, when duty-bound to make difficult decisions, sets aside his desire to return to Gondor in order to rescue Merry and Pippin, Sam must set aside his many rationalizations to follow his instincts and return to Frodo, where his heart leads him.

Previously, in deciding to leave Frodo behind and bear the Ring, Sam chose to take on Frodo’s duty as his own. However, in this passage, he realizes that the Ring isn’t his responsibility—Frodo is. After the doubt and despair of his former indecision, Sam correctly identifies his duty and makes the choice that aligns with it. Though it seems like the obviously wrong and selfish choice, to sacrifice the world to save Frodo’s body, Sam has nothing to guide him besides his own heart. His devotion to his duty is paramount to anything else; he “can’t help it” and he can’t move forward without Frodo. His devotion to his true duty, to be “at his master’s side,” steers him correctly in the end—as he soon finds out, Frodo is actually alive, and Sam must rescue him

before he gives away the location of the Ring—proving that, when one’s path is unclear, adherence to the right duty can

lead the way.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 1

Tracking Frodo's footprints, Aragorn climbs to the top of Amon Hen and sees a large eagle circling above him. The world looks dark and remote. Suddenly, Aragorn hears the voices of orcs and an echoing blast from the horn of Boromir. Realizing Boromir is in need, Aragorn rushes down the path and notices that Sam is no longer behind him. As Aragorn runs towards the battle crying "Elendil!" the horn sounds fainter and more desperately before it stops blowing and the sounds of battle also fade away. Aragorn finds Boromir propped against a tree, shot with many arrows and surrounded by the corpses of orcs he killed while defending the hobbits. His sword and horn are both broken on the ground. As Aragorn kneels beside him, Boromir weakly confesses that he tried to take the **Ring** from Frodo and that the orcs have taken the hobbits.

Boromir says goodbye to Aragorn and begs him to save Gondor in the wake of his failure. Aragorn assures Boromir that he has won a victory and that Gondor will be safe. Boromir dies with a smile on his face before he can tell Aragorn which way the orcs have taken the hobbits and whether Frodo was among them.

Aragorn, torn between going to Gondor and searching for the hobbits, mourns the collapse of the Fellowship and weeps over Boromir's body. Legolas and Gimli find him there, also summoned—too late—by the sound of Boromir's horn. The three companions plan to give Boromir a burial on the river before deciding where to go next. They don't know where Frodo is or if he was captured by the orcs, but they find two of the hobbits' knives among the possessions of the dead orcs. Some of the fallen figures are not orcs at all, but goblin-soldiers wearing the white S, the mark of Saruman. Aragorn guesses that, as Gandalf feared, Saruman has learned of their journey and likely also knows about Gandalf's death.

Boromir refers to the end of [The Fellowship of the Ring](#) when, tempted by the Ring's influence, he tried to take the Ring from Frodo to use in battle to protect Gondor and bring himself glory. Boromir recognizes that his actions were a betrayal of the Fellowship—whose goal is to destroy the Ring—and everything it stands for. Still, his efforts to defend the hobbits, as well as his own regret, reveal that he hasn't been wholly corrupted by the Ring. He isn't motivated by the promise of glory in protecting Merry and Pippin, but rather by simple necessity and generosity. Boromir complicates the relatively straightforward morality of Middle-earth, in which the forces of good join together to oppose the forces of evil. Neither wholly good nor wholly evil, Boromir's flaws and mistakes reveal the moral conflict that occurs within individuals.



Boromir's moral failings reflect a general decline in morality from previous eras in Middle-earth. The nation of Gondor suffers from that decline, leaving it particularly vulnerable to Sauron's influence, corruption, and domination. Aragorn, who works to heal Middle-earth from its decline, takes up the responsibility of Gondor's future, passed on to him by Boromir. As the realms of men can be healed and redeemed from their corruption, so, too, is Boromir's honor redeemed by defending the hobbits.



Aragorn's duty of leading the Fellowship after Gandalf's death now forces him to make a difficult choice in a time of crisis. His many responsibilities have begun to conflict, leaving him unsure of his priorities. His grief and frustration over Boromir's death and the separation of the Fellowship, too, render a clear decision difficult. The discovery of Saruman's goblin-soldiers, meanwhile, bodes ominously for the Fellowship.



Fashioning a bier made of branches and their cloaks, the three companions carry Boromir's body to the river with some difficulty, since he was tall and strong. There they discover that one of the boats is missing. They arrange Boromir's body in his elven cloak and golden belt, then place his weapons and the weapons of his enemies around him in a boat. He looks peaceful upon the water. They send the funeral boat away into the river and watch it until it vanishes. In the later days of Gondor, it is believed that the boat bore him all the way to the Great Sea. Aragorn and Legolas sing a lament for Boromir, asking the West, South, and North Winds for news of him. Gimli declines to sing a final verse about the East Wind, to which Aragorn agrees that the people of Gondor only "endure" the East Wind and don't ask it for news.

From the evidence on the shore—a missing boat, two missing packs, and a set of hobbit footprints—Aragorn determines that Frodo must have left by boat while the rest of the Fellowship was away and that Sam, who guessed Frodo's intentions, followed and departed with him. He notes that Frodo would find it hard to leave Sam behind even if he intended to leave alone. Gimli thinks it's strange that Frodo would leave without the rest of the Company, but Aragorn calls it brave. Frodo didn't want to lead his friends to their deaths and decided that he must take the **Ring** to Mount Doom himself. Legolas wonders if it was the orcs that led him to flee so quickly, but Aragorn disagrees. He doesn't tell Legolas and Gimli that it was Boromir who provoked Frodo's quick departure by trying to take the Ring.

Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli must now decide whether to follow Frodo and Sam across the river or rescue Merry and Pippin from the orcs. They have lost several hours arranging Boromir's funeral, and it will be difficult now to catch up with either pair of hobbits. Aragorn, though he wishes to follow Frodo to the very end of his quest, feels that Frodo's fate is now out of his control. To go after Frodo and Sam means abandoning the other two hobbits to a violent death. He decides that they will track the orcs to rescue Merry and Pippin.

Abandoning all the supplies they can spare to increase their speed, they pick up the orcs' trail from the glade where Boromir died. The orcs are quick and tireless, trampling down anything in their way. Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli must follow them on foot. They resolve to press on through the day and into the night. They conceive of themselves as taking part in a legendary chase and call themselves the Three Hunters.

Through the funeral and song, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli honor Boromir's life and death, hailing him as a hero. Their song implies that Gondor will miss and search for Boromir, until even the winds of Middle-earth know his name and his deeds. With this funeral, the narrator reveals, they give Boromir the glory he wanted and (by defending the hobbits to the point of death and proving his heroism) deserved. In the following years, Boromir will become a legend in Gondor, confirming that his honorable actions outweigh his attempt to seize the Ring.



Aragorn, who understands the burden of duty, quickly recognizes what Frodo has done in departing on his own for Mordor and what Sam has done in following him. Though their path is difficult, Frodo and Sam have done what their respective duties demand of them. Their choice to leave alone was necessary, but it took true courage to carry out. Aragorn's decision not to tell anyone about Boromir's betrayal of Frodo is an effort to preserve Boromir's memory as the person he was before the corrupting influence of the Ring: flawed, yet overwhelmingly selfless and unquestionably heroic.



For the time being, Aragorn must set aside his promise to Boromir and his duty to Gondor. Aragorn's pressing duty to the Fellowship demands that he support Frodo and accompany him into Mordor, but to do so is to leave Merry and Pippin to die. As the leader of the Fellowship, Aragorn is forced to reevaluate his duties to the quest and choose his actions accordingly. With Frodo's departure, the Fellowship is broken, and its original responsibilities are nullified. Frodo is no longer under Aragorn's care, and Aragorn recognizes that he has the greatest responsibility to those who have the most need of him.



Aragorn urges Legolas and Gimli not to seek fame itself, but to achieve a feat worthy of fame in hunting down the orc company and rescuing the hobbits. The mention of legendary deeds is only the three friends' wish for success against all odds. Their true motivation is Merry and Pippin's safety and their own adherence to their duty to their friends, not their own glory.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 2

The pace of the Three Hunters slows as they reach a range of hills, forcing them to climb up steep ridges and down into valleys again. The land is misty and shadowed as they travel into the night. Near dawn, as they stop to rest, they lose the orc-trail in a valley. Aragorn guesses that the orcs will go north, taking the shortest path possible through the lands of Rohan. As Aragorn searches the ground for clues, Legolas discovers that what they'd thought were boulders are actually the bodies of five of the orcs they've been tracking. Their killers are a mystery, but Aragorn theorizes that the deaths might have been caused by other orcs in an internal conflict. He adds that the riders of Rohan rarely travel in this region and that the area is too far from Minas Tirith for it to be likely that men killed the orcs. There is no sign of the hobbits around the bodies.

As the sky turns lighter, Aragorn rediscovers the orc trail and, freshly energized, they follow it onto a hill. From that height, Aragorn can see shadows in the West, the colors of dawn over the meadows of Rohan, and the snow-capped White Mountains of Gondor to the south. He recites a poem about Gondor, though he knows his path leads him away from it for now.

Legolas sees an eagle far above them headed north and Aragorn wonders if it's the same bird he saw before. They also notice a huge company on foot, many leagues ahead of them, that must be the orcs. It seems that the orcs are marching as quickly as possible, traveling through the night and dropping unnecessary supplies as they go. The Three Hunters follow them, eventually reaching the sweet-smelling grass of Rohan. The air is warmer, and the ground is flatter than the range of hills behind them, enabling them to run and lessen the distance between themselves and the orcs.

As they chase the orcs, Aragorn suddenly gives a cry and turns away to follow a trail of smaller feet, where he discovers the brooch of Pippin's elven-cloak. Aragorn guesses Pippin ran away from the trail and left the brooch for him as a sign. Gimli is heartened—Pippin is alive and has “the use of his wits, and of his legs, too.” The Three Hunters run on through the day, then debate whether to run through the night and risk missing further signs of the hobbits or to rest and risk falling behind. Legolas and Gimli leave the difficult choice to Aragorn, who feels as though all his recent decisions have gone awry. Though the orcs certainly won't stop to sleep, Aragorn decides to rest through the night so that they don't lose the trail in the dark.

The orcs' tendency to fight among themselves reveals one of the fundamental differences between Sauron's allies and the Fellowship's allies. The orcs lack both honor and unity. Their belligerence and betrayals are representative of the enemy. Rather than uniting towards their common goal, as the Fellowship did (with the brief exception of Boromir's temptation), the orcs have constant internal conflict. Because they conceive of power as consolidated in one individual, as Sauron does, the orcs' every effort must be a ceaseless struggle for power and control.



Aragorn grows more hopeful as the sun rises. Dawn provides clarity, opportunity, and a fresh beginning. He longs to return to Gondor but, showing his devotion to his duty, refuses to abandon his responsibility to Merry and Pippin, even if the hunt seems almost impossible.



The natural beauty of Rohan enlivens and cheers up the Three Hunters, and it also suggests that Rohan, unlike other, morally corrupted lands, retains a glimpse of its former glory and hasn't yet fallen into total decay. With the orcs in sight, too, the companions have greater reason to hope for success. The orcs are moving swiftly but recklessly, going without sleep and leaving physical marks on the natural world by dropping their belongings and trash, revealing their lack of care for the lands of Middle-earth.



The brooch, the first sign that the hobbits are still alive, is a discovery worthy of celebration, encouraging the Three Hunters in their pursuit. Again, it falls to Aragorn to make the difficult decisions for the group—one of the burdens of leadership. Though these decisions clearly trouble and discourage him, his devotion to his duty demands that he make them, and he rises to the challenge even when he's unsure. Aragorn chooses to be careful rather than swift, and to prioritize their own rest—the exact opposite of the orcs' heedless rush.



Gimli wishes for a **phial** of light like the one Galadriel gave Frodo, but Aragorn argues that Frodo needs it more. Frodo has the truly important quest; theirs is small in comparison.

While devoted to his current endeavors, Aragorn also understands that the part he, Legolas, and Gimli will play in the coming war is far less important than Frodo's task. His decision reflects his ability to keep their duty and Frodo's in a wisely balanced perspective. Frodo is the one who will need the phial—which provides light, clarity, and strength—not the three of them. They will have to make do with the strength they have and wait for the dawn's light.



They pick up the trail again before the sun rises. The orcs didn't rest in the night and are out of even Legolas's keen sight. Aragorn presses his ear to the ground to track the sound of their feet, but hears instead the sound of distant horses galloping towards them. The Three Hunters follow the orcs' faint trail without rest, eating **lembas** bread to give them strength. Aragorn wonders why they haven't seen any signs of life where there should have been herdsmen in the fields.

The lands of Rohan, though beautiful, are strangely deserted. This vacancy is a subtle indication of the ways in which Middle-earth has declined from its former state of beauty and goodness. Aragorn, familiar with how the world used to be, notices the acceleration of the world's decline. The lembas that the Three Hunters eat fortifies them not only physically but also spiritually; still, it can't banish Aragorn's unease at the state of the land.



The Three Hunters rest again at dusk, though every stop makes their goal of rescuing the hobbits more hopeless. Aragorn senses something strange in the silence of the land and the unusual weariness of his heart, and guesses that some foe is hindering them while aiding the orcs. Legolas agrees that there is some ill will ahead of them—Saruman. Nonetheless, Aragorn refuses to turn back. They all sleep.

Saruman has the power of his armies and his spies, but—much like Sauron—he also has the nameless and oppressive power to create a weight and weariness in the minds of his enemies to deter them from approaching his land. The Three Hunters suffer from it but, aware that it's caused by Saruman, don't allow despair to prevent them from carrying out their mission.



Legolas wakes up Aragorn and Gimli, claiming that something strange awaits them by the forest and that they're called to it. They set off again. Aragorn, examining the tracks, determines that they're over a day behind the orcs. Gimli comments that his body wouldn't feel so tired if he weren't so disheartened. While Legolas walks as lightly as ever, Gimli and Aragorn are weary. As night falls, Legolas urges them to rest and not to give up hope.

Saruman's magic specifically attacks the Three Hunters' emotions, making them spiritually weary, but that weariness affects their physical capabilities in the same way that great physical strain or a direct attack would. The enemy recognizes that despair defeats people, a tactic the Hunters must intentionally resist.



On the fourth morning of their chase, Aragorn, noticing a shadow in the distance, lies on the ground to listen to the earth and tells his companions that riders on swift horses are approaching. Legolas, with his elven eyesight, agrees and adds that "there are one hundred and five. Yellow is their hair and bright are their spears." When Aragorn, amused, calls the eyesight of the elves "keen," Legolas argues that the riders aren't very far away.

Legolas, significantly less affected by Saruman's magic than Aragorn or Gimli, is far more cheerful than his companions. His ability to joke around and poke fun at Aragorn, even under such dire circumstances, is a welcome and necessary reprieve for Aragorn and Gimli, who labor under stress and weariness. Legolas's lightheartedness is as important to their continued quest as Aragorn's decision-making and Gimli's steadfast determination.



The riders are approaching the Three Hunters along the same trail that the orcs were taking the other way, but Legolas can't see any hobbits among them. Though Gimli is wary of being attacked by the riders, Aragorn decides to wait and ask them for news. Aragorn knows the men of Rohan, old allies of Gondor—they are proud and bold, yet generous. Gimli says he heard a rumor from Gandalf that they pay tribute to Mordor, but Aragorn doesn't believe it.

Aragorn judges the riders not on what they might do but rather on the ancient values of their society. Though he knows that Middle-earth is in a decline, partially caused by a loss of virtue and courtesy among the nations of men, he refuses to believe that Rohan has sunk so far into corruption that they would bow to Mordor or attack harmless travelers. While it's true that optimism is a vital shield against the enemy's weaponization of fear and despair, Aragorn's judgement of the riders seems possibly idealized, even unrealistic, especially following Gimli's logical caution.



The riders of Rohan—tall, stern men on proud horses—thunder past. When they appear not to notice the Three Hunters, Aragorn stands and calls out to them, asking for news from the north. The host of riders turns with great speed and charges back, surrounding the Three Hunters in a circle of running horses. Suddenly, the men halt and level their spears and bows at the three companions. The tallest man, who wears a helm with a white horsetail, points a spear at Aragorn and demands to know who he is and why he's in the land. Aragorn introduces himself as Strider, and says he is in Rohan to hunt orcs.

The riders of Rohan look the part of the bold heroes Aragorn described to his companions. Still, it appears that Gimli may have been right about their intentions when the riders surround and threaten the Three Hunters. The leader of the riders is brusque and just as suspicious of the Three Hunters as Gimli is of him. The riders' behavior reflects necessary caution in such dangerous times—or, possibly, that Rohan has sided with Sauron after all.



The leader of the horsemen dismounts and says that the three companions must not know much about orcs if they plan to hunt them on foot. Finding Aragorn suspicious, he questions him about his name, his clothes, and how it was that the riders didn't notice him until he spoke. Aragorn replies that they have passed through Lothlórien and taken the gifts of the Lady with them. The rider is briefly entranced by the mention of Galadriel, then accuses them of being sorcerers and asks why Gimli and Legolas don't speak for themselves.

Like many men of Middle-earth, the leader of the riders of Rohan is both amazed and slightly frightened by the idea that legendary characters such as Galadriel are active in the world again. It implies that things are imminently changing in Middle-earth, in spite of (or even because of) its slow decline. The lead riders' fear of Galadriel is in itself an indication of the world's decline. That is, the realms of men have stopped collaborating with the other races of Middle-earth and instead keep to themselves, growing insular, wary, and suspicious.



Gimli insists that the rider give his name first. The man says he is Éomer son of Éomund. Gimli introduces himself as well, then insults Éomer's intellect and warns him against speaking ill of Galadriel. Éomer threatens to cut off Gimli's head if he only stood "a little higher from the ground." Legolas is quick to defend Gimli, fitting an arrow in his bow. Éomer raises his sword, but Aragorn jumps between them, asking Éomer to hear their tale before he attacks.

Gimli is overzealous in his defense of Galadriel's honor and almost starts the fight he initially wanted to avoid with the riders of Rohan. Even so, his insistence on respect and courtesy is emblematic of the better days of Middle-earth, which Éomer recognizes and concedes to as well. The tense exchange (with a note of humor) hints that Rohan isn't in utter decline.



As Éomer lowers his sword, Aragorn asks if he is a friend or enemy of Sauron. Éomer answers that he serves only Théoden King of Rohan and that his people desire to be free and not serve a foreign land. When he asks who Aragorn serves, Aragorn responds that he serves no man. He hunts down the Orcs out of necessity, because they have taken two of his friends.

Aragorn throws aside his cloak and unsheathes the sword Andúril, declaring himself Aragorn, the heir of Isildur and demands, “Will you aid me or thwart me? Choose swiftly!” To Gimli and Legolas, watching amazed, Aragorn seems to have grown in stature before their eyes. In Aragorn’s face is the power of his ancestors, the kings carved of stone, and Legolas sees a flash of a white flame on his forehead like a crown. Éomer steps back in awe, muttering that these are days in which old legends walk again.

Éomer asks what brings Aragorn here and what fate he brings with him. Aragorn says that Théoden has a choice: to go to war either with or against Sauron. Aragorn adds that he will come to present this choice to Théoden later if he can. For now, though, he wants news of the orcs that took his friends. Éomer tells him that the Rohirrim have killed all the orcs and burned their bodies. Éomer didn’t see the hobbits among the orcs.

Another rider laughs at the mention of the halflings, whom he thinks are just an old children’s tale, and asks if they walk in legends or in daylight. Aragorn replies that it is possible to walk in both, since the generations to come will see this current generation as legends. The same rider urges Éomer to hurry south, but Éomer tells him to assemble the riders on the path, leaving him alone to speak to the Three Hunters.

When Aragorn reveals that he set out with Boromir and Gandalf in a company, Éomer warns him that Gandalf is no longer in Théoden’s favor because he took the king’s horse Shadowfax. Gandalf is a “herald of strange events: a bringer of evil, some now say.” It was after Gandalf came to Rohan in the summer, warning that Isengard was preparing for war, that they began to have trouble with Saruman. Aragorn tells Éomer that the reason Shadowfax has returned to Rohan is because of Gandalf’s death in the Mines of Moria—a greater loss than anyone in the land understands.

Though Éomer swears that he doesn’t serve Sauron and that his nation doesn’t intend to ally with him, he doesn’t claim that Rohan intends to oppose Sauron, either. In the approaching worldwide fight between good and evil, Rohan hasn’t yet picked a side, instead preferring to keep to themselves—another reflection of the decline of the nations of men from their former righteousness.



There hasn’t been a king of Gondor for generations. When Aragorn reveals himself, claiming his identity as the heir to the throne of Gondor, he seems to have stepped directly out of Middle-earth’s noble and moral past. His greatness and heroism are briefly visible in his manner and on his face, the internal qualities visibly expressed.



Aragorn understands that Rohan must take a side in the coming conflict. The men of the world have spent the past generations concerned only with their own affairs rather than tending to the world as a whole. Because of this, Sauron was able to rise to power again unnoticed. Now, if the world as they know it is to survive, all the nations and races must join to fight against him.



Rather than showing respect for what he doesn’t understand, or awe for the wonderful and strange things in the world, the scornful rider discounts an entire race of people as a children’s story. Many of the men of the world have become incurious and ignored the teachings of legend. Aragorn, who has great respect for old legends and tales, understands that those tales are based in experience and wisdom; therefore ignoring them imperils everyone.



While, to the Fellowship and most of their allies, Gandalf is a figure who brings wisdom, help, and comfort in their times of trial, Rohan has a different opinion of him. Théoden’s perception of Gandalf as a bringer of evil rather than a bringer of aid is a strong indication that something is wrong in Rohan. The fact that Saruman is causing trouble in the area hints that he might be behind this mistrustful attitude.



Aragorn tells Éomer that Boromir, too, is dead, killed by the orcs they were hunting. Éomer calls Boromir a worthy man and mourns his death, then praises Aragorn for his swiftness in crossing forty-five leagues in five days, naming him “Wingfoot.” Though Éomer has to hurry back to Théoden, he promises that Rohan doesn’t pay tribute to Sauron and will not forget their old alliance with Gondor. Years ago, Sauron wanted to buy horses from Rohan, who refused. Sauron sent orcs to steal black horses and use them for evil purposes.

Recently, Rohan has been at war with Saruman, who walks around in disguise as an old man much like Gandalf, dressed in a hood and cloak, and has many spies. Éomer implies that there might be spies in the king’s house and invites Aragorn to come and aid them. Aragorn promises to come when he can but refuses to desert the hobbits, even when Éomer urges him to come fight in the battle happening now on the Westemnet.

Éomer admits that he took the men of his household to kill the orcs without the king’s permission and left his house with little protection. He needs to hurry back and asks Aragorn a final time to accompany him since there is no hope for his friends—he and his men left none of the orcs alive. Aragorn reminds him that the hobbits have the power of the elvish cloaks which enable them to go unnoticed even in daylight.

Éomer says the world has gone strange: men speak to Galadriel and live, and the sword that was broken in the ages of legend returns to war. He wonders how a man can “judge what to do in such times.” Aragorn tells him that good and evil remain unchanged; a man must judge as he always has. Once his quest of finding the hobbits is achieved, Aragorn vows to Éomer that he will come talk to Théoden. Though Éomer says that he should not let strangers wander freely on Rohan’s lands, he lends the Three Hunters horses and parts ways with them.

In the late afternoon, the Three Hunters reach the edge of Fangorn forest where they find the ashes of the orcs burned by the Rohirrim. By nightfall, they have found no sign of the hobbits, and Gimli believes their bodies were burned with the orcs. He remembers that Elrond was against the hobbits coming with the Fellowship and says that Gandalf’s “foresight failed him” in bringing them. Aragorn responds that Gandalf’s recommendation was not based on safety and that some things are worth attempting despite the danger of a dark end.

Éomer reveals himself to be a man with the values (if not the manners) of bygone years. Though Théoden might not officially agree to aid Gondor in the coming war with Sauron, Éomer takes it upon himself to pledge Rohan’s aid. Though he is loyal to his king, he and his country also have a duty to stand with Middle-earth against a great enemy. Rohan has the misfortune of being plagued by both Saruman and Sauron at once, possibly explaining why Rohan has only concerned itself with its own affairs in recent days.



Éomer suspects that Saruman might be directly responsible for Rohan’s troubles, both by sending orc armies into their fields and by meddling in Théoden’s own house. Feeling unequipped to solve the problem personally, Éomer requests Aragorn’s aid in both places—as both a diplomat and a soldier. Aragorn, however, is mindful of his duty to the other members of the Fellowship.



Though Éomer is deeply loyal to Théoden, he, like Aragorn, finds himself with conflicting duties. In this case, his duty to maintain the safety of his nation supersedes his duty to Théoden, leading him to disobey orders.



Aragorn’s understanding of morality is simple and straightforward. No matter how the world may change or decline, no matter how strange or how complicated it may grow, it’s still every person’s duty to determine right from wrong and act accordingly. That has never changed and will never change, no matter the circumstances. In response, Éomer does just that, determining for himself the just course of action, and permits the Three Hunters to continue on their journey.



Gimli has entirely given up hope of finding the hobbits alive. His despair closes his mind to other possibilities besides the worst he can think of—that the hobbits were killed accidentally and needlessly with their captors. Gimli searches for someone to blame, but as Aragorn points out, the hobbits knew the risks of joining the Fellowship and freely chose to devote themselves to its mission.



The Three Hunters make camp and Aragorn warns Gimli against cutting living wood from Fangorn to start a fire. When they do build a fire from dead wood they gather, the tree above them seems to bend and take comfort in the warmth. Legolas recalls that Celeborn warned them not to go too far into Fangorn, which is old even for the elves. While keeping watch as the others sleep, Gimli sees the figure of an old man in a cloak and hat just outside the firelight. He wakes Legolas and Aragorn, but the figure disappears, and they realize their horses are gone. Gimli believes the figure was Saruman, but Aragorn is less certain. The night passes, and neither the horses nor the old man return.

The stories the Three Hunters have heard about Fangorn give the sense that the forest is both sentient and dangerous. Middle-earth itself is aware of the harm being done to its natural landscape and has the capacity, in certain places, to feel and express anger about its mistreatment. Fangorn serves as one of those mouthpieces to express the pain of the land. The natural landscapes of Middle-earth long preceded most of the Free Peoples who live in them now, yet they face swiftly approaching ecological disaster if Sauron or Saruman takes control.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 3

Pippin wakes up from a nightmare to find himself tied up beside Merry in the middle of a company of orcs. He recalls that he and Merry had run into the orcs in the woods and attempted to fight them before Boromir arrived. The orcs knocked Pippin out after they shot Boromir with arrows, and he doesn't know where he is or what happened to his companions. He feels like a nuisance waiting for rescue and wishes that Gandalf hadn't persuaded Elrond to let the hobbits go with the Fellowship.

Tempted to despair, Pippin finds himself regretting the choices that brought him to captivity. Pippin agrees with Gimli; he shouldn't have joined the Fellowship. He doesn't feel that way out of concern for his safety, though, but because of his feelings of helplessness and worthlessness— as far as he can see, he's only hindered the quest.



When they realize Pippin is awake, the orcs threaten him until he lies still. Pippin realizes that he can understand some of the orcs' speech and listens to them. They have orders to bring any hobbits they find back to Isengard "alive and as captured." An orc called Uglúk appears to be the leader and kills several followers of another orc named Grishnákh, who questions the authority of Saruman. One of the dead orcs falls on top of Pippin, still holding a knife. Seeing that Uglúk is distracted, Pippin uses the knife to cut the ropes binding his arms. He holds the ropes in place to avoid suspicion and waits for an opportunity to escape.

Pippin feels more hopeful once he realizes he can understand the orcs' speech and spy on them. The company is composed of orcs from several different places with different loyalties. The orcs see power as something to be hoarded rather than shared, fighting amongst themselves and struggling for control over their mission. This division of the company is an obvious weakness that Pippin, overlooked and underestimated, is quick to exploit.



The orcs carry the hobbits to the edge of a cliff, then cut the ropes around their legs and force them to climb down themselves. An orc scout spots a single horseman, but doesn't attempt to kill him, instead driving the orcs to travel faster to Isengard before the horseman calls the Rohirrim to hunt them down. The orcs warn Pippin not to run and give him and Merry a burning drink that eases the pain in Pippin's legs. Merry has a gash on his forehead, but he stands and greets Pippin, sarcastically asking for breakfast.

The orcs take pleasure in treating the hobbits cruelly, only healing them enough that they're able to walk during their forced march across the fields of Rohan. They attempt to dissuade the hobbits from fleeing by keeping them fearful and hopeless of escape. Still, Merry wakes with his customary sarcastic humor, which gives him a measure of resilience in this desperate situation.



Merry and Pippin descend into the ravine, separated from each other by a dozen orcs. Uglúk informs the orcs that they will run through the night and the next day, despite their protests that they can't run in the light. Their pace is grueling, and Pippin wonders how long he can keep it up on so little food. The bottom of the ravine is filled with mist, swallowing up the orcs at the front of the company.

Pippin takes his chance and darts away from his three guards into the mist. Though Pippin is quickly caught, he does manage to drop the brooch from his cloak, in hopes that Aragorn can track it. Yet as he is carried away by the orcs, he assumes that his effort was useless since the remaining members of the Company will likely have gone with Frodo.

Merry and Pippin, miserable and cold, are forced to run with the orcs, and later can't remember much of the journey. Eventually, the orcs demand to rest and Pippin is allowed to lie down and given stale bread. Pippin hears an argument break out among the orcs between the Isengarders, led by Uglúk, and the Northerners. The Northerners fear the Rohirrim, who are tracking them, and Uglúk tells them to leave if they want. Most of them flee towards the mountains and the hobbits are left with the Isengarders. To Uglúk's distaste, Grishnákh and his followers arrive from the east to rejoin the company and help deliver the hobbits. The Isengard orcs pick up the hobbits and start running, eventually overtaking the fleeing Northerners. Grishnákh spots the Rohirrim behind them and the orcs speed up, attempting to reach the forest, where the Rohirrim might not follow.

Pippin thinks the orcs might escape, but the horsemen surround them, driving the orcs along the river. All Pippin knows about the Rohirrim is that Gandalf's horse Shadowfax comes from their land, a thought which sounds hopeful. Still, Pippin wonders how the horsemen will know that he and Merry aren't orcs, since they probably haven't heard of hobbits. He figures it's likely that he and Merry will be killed "together with their captors" before the Rohirrim even know they're there. The riders pick off orcs with arrows until nightfall, but don't actually engage them in battle, instead waiting for sunrise.

Uglúk's leadership contrasts sharply with Aragorn's; he cares little for the comfort of the orcs he oversees, and his only goal is taking the hobbits to Isengard as quickly as possible. The orcs dislike his orders, but they don't openly rebel since Uglúk proved his power by killing several Northern orcs. Put another way, it's clear that the orcs obey out of fear instead of loyalty and respect.



As the orcs traverse Middle-earth, the land itself seems to dislike their invasive presence and work against them, such as when the mist rises in the valley. Though Pippin leaves his brooch as a sign when he's captured again, he has little real hope of it ever being discovered. He convinces himself not to expect pursuit or rescue from his friends, since he and Merry recognize that they aren't the Fellowship's priority—they know Frodo is.



Though hobbits are resilient and skilled in finding joy in small victories, Merry and Pippin are now gloomy and downtrodden. The physical discomfort of their capture and the lack of hope of rescue makes it difficult for them to hold onto optimism. The fighting among the orcs leads to more desertion from the company. Rather than adhere to their duty and remain with the hobbits, the Northern orcs flee for their lives—a fundamental difference between themselves and the members of the Fellowship who remain devoted to their duty even through hardship and danger.



Though the Rohirrim might rescue them if they could, it's more likely the hobbits will be killed accidentally in the battle. Still guarded by the orcs and now surrounded by the Rohirrim, Pippin doesn't see any way they can escape with their lives. The hobbits seem doomed to be treated as baggage or collateral damage, things to be rescued or carelessly destroyed by others, unable (at the moment, anyway) to meaningfully take action for themselves.



Grishnákh mocks the leadership of Uglúk, who orders the hobbits to be tied up and kept away from the horsemen. Uglúk explains why they can't just charge at the Rohirrim, who see too well at night for it to be an effective attack. This appeases the Isengard orcs, but the others are still frustrated and rebellious. Merry is too exhausted to crawl even if they could escape, but Pippin remembers that they have some **lembas** to eat.

When Uglúk and the Isengarders are drawn away by a shout from the side of the company, Grishnákh searches the hobbits. Pippin realizes that he's looking for the **Ring** and wonders if he can use Grishnákh's desire to escape. Impersonating Gollum, Pippin tells Grishnákh that "It" isn't easy to find, and then adds "my precious." Pippin offers to exchange the location of the Ring for their freedom, but Grishnákh isn't tempted since Sauron can get the information out of them, which is why they're being kept alive. Merry then tries to convince him that Saruman will take the Ring for himself when they reach Isengard, and Grishnákh won't get any credit with Sauron for delivering the hobbits.

Grishnákh loses his temper, asking if either of them has the **Ring**, but Merry demands again that they be freed before they tell him. Rather than untying them, Grishnákh grabs them violently and steals them away from the orc company. When he encounters a horseman, he draws his sword to kill the hobbits rather than let them be rescued, but an arrow pierces his hand, and he drops the sword. Another horseman kills him with a spear and the hobbits remain on the ground, unseen in their elven-cloaks and unharmed by the horses passing over them.

As Merry wonders how they might get away without being killed, there is a ruckus from the orcs who have discovered the hobbits' disappearance. Other orcs arrive and begin to attack the horsemen, and the hobbits realize that they're outside the circle of the Rohirrim and able to escape. Pippin drops the cut ropes around his wrists, and the two eat **lembas**, which reminds them of happy memories. Pippin then grabs Grishnákh's knife and cuts through the rest of their ropes.

Merry and Pippin crawl away until they're able to walk along the river towards the forest. The sounds of the battle die away behind them and the hobbits chat lightly about what happened since their capture. Merry praises Pippin for his resourcefulness and tells him he'll "get almost a chapter in old Bilbo's book." He takes the lead from Pippin, since he knows where they are, and Pippin reminds him of the warnings they've heard about Fangorn forest.

Uglúk's hold over the orc company becomes more tenuous with the return of Grishnákh and the threat of the Rohirrim; they seem to be nearing the point of all-out mutiny. The hobbits are weary in both body and mind after their ordeal, but Pippin has an optimistic thought: if they find an opportunity to escape, they can fortify themselves—body and mind—with lembas.



Remembering the lembas gives Pippin the burst of hope and energy necessary to form a plan. The hobbits attempt to use Grishnákh's own treacherous nature against him by turning him against Uglúk and the other members of his company. Pippin has been listening intently and recognizes the way Grishnákh conceives of power (as something only one person can possess). By suggesting that he take the Ring directly to Sauron, where Grishnákh can take all the credit for delivering it, the hobbits have a chance to bargain for their freedom or escape.



Though Grishnákh doesn't take the hobbits' bargain for their freedom, he is influenced enough by their persuasion to steal them away from the other orcs. His greed is repaid by the surrounding Rohirrim, who swiftly notice and kill him. Through a combination of Grishnákh's selfishness and their own good luck, Merry and Pippin find themselves free from the orc company.



Pippin's plans, though he despaired of them ever working, have all contributed to their escape. With his hands already freed during the brawl when he first awoke, Pippin is able to reach their lembas and cut their other bindings. The lembas doesn't only give them the physical strength to continue fleeing from the approaching fight, but also provides them with a calm moment of emotional respite after all the terror and hopelessness of their captivity.



Being worthy of earning a place in Bilbo's book is the highest praise Merry can give Pippin, but he only thinks of it after the danger has passed. Any glory Pippin receives from his resourcefulness during their time with the orcs will be the byproduct of his heroism, not its motivation. In the moment, Pippin was motivated only by necessity.



Fleeing into the forest despite the warnings, Merry and Pippin hear men singing and the sounds of battle as the sun rises and the Rohirrim attack. They don't stay to watch Uglúk be killed by Éomer's sword at the edge of Fangorn or the bodies of the orcs be burned by the Rohirrim. No news of the orc raid ever reaches Isengard or Mordor, though many people see the smoke of the fire.

Unlike Pippin, who has heroically saved himself and Merry from their captors, the orcs have done nothing worth remembering. No news of the hobbits ever reaches their masters Saruman or Sauron, and all their effort, fighting, and struggles for power amount to nothing. The hobbits' and orcs' contrasting fates suggest that while doing what's necessary is often honorable, fighting for power rightfully comes to nothing.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 4

Merry and Pippin hurry through the forest. The air is stuffy and they find it difficult to breathe. They agree that the forest feels very old, though it doesn't look like Bilbo's description of Mirkwood. They're low on supplies, and stop briefly to drink from a stream, but press on to investigate a shaft of sunlight illuminating a natural staircase in the side of a hill. They climb eagerly towards the fresh air, not noticing that their injuries are healed and their strength has returned. From the top of the staircase, they can see that they're three or four miles into the trees. Pippin remarks that, in the sunlight, he almost feels that he likes the forest.

Whether Merry and Pippin's injuries are healed by the lembas they ate right before entering the forest or their drink from the stream, it implies that a return to the natural world is a curative thing. Even if the forest is stuffy and strange, it's still far better than captivity with the orcs, and, in the sunlight—which offers warmth, sight, and clarity—it's almost welcoming.



Suddenly, an unfamiliar voice sarcastically answers that Pippin's comment is "uncommonly kind" and that he almost feels that he dislikes them but won't be hasty. A large hand turns them around and lifts them up. Merry and Pippin stare at a man- or troll-like figure with a bushy grey beard, wearing green and grey bark. He has deep, solemn eyes that Pippin feels are "filled up with ages of memory." The figure thinks the hobbits are very odd and almost mistook them for little orcs.

This figure is an enemy of the orcs, and therefore likely to be an ally for Merry and Pippin. In his great age and his quick humor, he's not unlike Gandalf, Tom Bombadil, and some of the other very old creatures of Middle-earth. In his physical appearance, this figure is almost treelike, as though a representative of the forest itself—and, by extension, the ancient and natural world of Middle-earth—has appeared to speak to the hobbits.



Pippin, unafraid, asks who this being is. The figure introduces himself as an ent, named Fangorn or Treebeard, and wonders what sort of people the hobbits are. Treebeard recites a list of living creatures, starting with the "free peoples": elves, dwarves, ents, and humans. Merry tells Treebeard that they're hobbits and Pippin offers a new verse to add to the list of creatures.

Hobbits are as unfamiliar to Treebeard as ents are to Merry and Pippin; in Fangorn forest, two different stories out of Rohan's legends meet. Treebeard seems interested in cataloguing and listing the living beings of Middle-earth and finds that hobbits have no place in his ordering of the world. Indeed, hobbits naturally exist apart and unnoticed from much of Middle-earth, as a race of primarily quiet home-bodies. Merry and Pippin, however, adventurous for hobbits, are glad to add themselves to Treebeard's list.



Treebeard warns them not to tell everyone they meet the name that they call themselves (hobbits) because it holds power. Merry tells him that they aren't very careful, and he and Pippin introduce themselves with their full names. Treebeard says that his own name would take a long time to say, since it's like a story, growing all the time. The language of the ents is slow because they don't say anything unless it's worth taking a long time to say.

Treebeard is right that names hold power: for example, when Aragorn declares himself with his full title, his power and nobility become suddenly unmistakable. Consequently, many people represent themselves with nicknames (such as Aragorn's alias "Strider") and translate their names to different languages. The hobbits, however, have no such guile. They introduce themselves with their full names and prefer to be called by their personal name for their species (hobbits) rather than anyone else's name for them. The language of the ents further emphasizes the importance of names. Ent names constantly evolve and describe their subject—to speak them would take a long time and reveal everything about that subject, hence the rarity of doing so.



Treebeard asks about Gandalf, and Pippin tells him that Gandalf's story is over. Treebeard carries the hobbits towards his home, where they plan to tell him their story. On the way, Pippin asks why Celeborn warned them about Fangorn forest. Treebeard calls Lothlórien a strange place and then explains that people "come to grief" in Fangorn because some of the trees have bad hearts. The ents are herders of trees, though there are few left awake to tend to the forest.

In the world of Middle-earth, growing ever more complicated, even the natural land can contain both good and evil. As a nation is made of people, some good and some bad, a forest is made of trees, some good and some bad. If the trees are angry about the destruction of the environment, they may lash out. Treebeard can guide the trees, but he doesn't control them.



In his home, Treebeard offers the hobbits a drink that smells faintly like the forest and invigorates them. As they tell Treebeard about their adventures, he seems particularly interested in Gandalf and the activities of Saruman. Treebeard says he is on nobody's "side" because no one is on *his* side—he doesn't meddle in the troubles of elves and men. However, he is against all Orcs and against Saruman, a wizard and the head of the White Council. Saruman used to be polite to Treebeard, but then turned to evil ways in his search for power. Now he and his orcs cut down Treebeard's trees. Treebeard declares that he will stop it and the hobbits agree to help.

Saruman's decline from the courtesy of his former days both reflects and contributes to the broader decline of Middle-earth from its past beauty and nobility. When Saruman stopped showing Treebeard kindness, he stopped showing the world kindness, beginning to consider the environment only as something to exploit and abuse. Treebeard, like the men of Rohan, is discovering that it will soon be impossible to be on nobody's "side" in the coming conflict. Inaction is dangerous in such times, and if he wishes to oppose Saruman, who cuts down his trees and disrespects the land, Treebeard must act.



There are only two other ents in Fangorn forest because there have been no ent children. Treebeard interrupts the hobbits' story to ask if they've seen any entwives during their travels. Long ago, the ents and the entwives had a disagreement over how to tend to nature. The entwives wanted to build gardens and command plants rather than just aid them in their growing. The ents remained in their forest, and when they went to visit the gardens of the entwives, they found the land burned and the entwives gone. The elves have a song claiming that the ents will meet the entwives again after their lands are barren.

As the beauty of the world of Middle-earth has declined, so have the ents. Treebeard implies that, though he misses the entwives and longs for their return, their fall was due to their own search for power. Rather than being shepherds of nature, as they should be, the entwives interpreted their duties differently, seeking to control and order nature in gardens. And though the entwives may return, it will only be at a time of ecological disaster.



Merry and Pippin sleep as Treebeard goes to stand in the rain. In the morning, Treebeard takes them to a gathering of ents, who all look as different from each other as different types of trees. When the melodic language of the ents starts putting Pippin to sleep, Treebeard sends the hobbits outside. Merry and Pippin wonder where Isengard is and what it's like. They agree that they feel safe with the ents but have the sense that the ents could be dangerous if provoked.

Representatives of the land and the growing things of Middle-earth are beginning to join the fight against the forces that seek to destroy the natural world. The ents are slow to speak, slow to move, and slow to act, but Merry and Pippin have the sense that there's something more volatile beneath their plodding exteriors. So, too, can the natural world itself be made dangerous over time if mistreated or abused.



Treebeard explains to the hobbits that they still have to contact the ents who live far away and decide what to do about Saruman. He introduces them to a "hasty" ent named Quickbeam who picks them up and takes them to his ent-house to sleep. He tells the hobbits about his rowan trees, cut down by the orcs. They remain in Quickbeam's company for the next two days. On the third afternoon, the ents come to a decision and march singing to attack Isengard.

This fight against Saruman isn't the responsibility of Treebeard alone, but of the many ents across Middle-earth who wish to protect their trees from the evil forces who wish to burn and exploit them. Their duty as shepherds of the trees can no longer be to only watch over their forests—they must participate once more in the greater community of the world.



As Treebeard picks up the hobbits again, they ask if the ents will really break down the doors of Isengard. Treebeard assures the hobbits that they can—once roused to battle, they are stronger than trolls, which are made by Sauron as a mockery of ents. Treebeard does admit that it's possible they are marching to their deaths, but they may be able to help others before Saruman overpowers them. Pippin, half asleep, thinks he can see groves of trees moving, as though Fangorn forest is awake and marching with them to war. Night falls as they reach Isengard and look down over the valley of Saruman.

Pippin's vision of the moving forest portrays how the natural world itself is fighting back against its oppressors. Rather than staying in their forests to protect themselves and their own small lands, the ents have decided to risk their lives and join together to fight for the entirety of Middle-earth. The ents' motivations are selfless—it's likely that the battle with Saruman will end with the destruction of their fading species. Still, their duty to the natural world demands that they deter the forces causing Middle-earth's decline. If nothing else, the ents will sacrifice themselves in the hopes of doing some good for others before they die.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 5

At dawn, the Three Hunters search the ground for signs of the hobbits. Gimli is still certain that the old man they saw the previous night was Saruman, but Aragorn is less convinced. Legolas heard the horses when they bolted, and he believes they seemed excited rather than scared, as though they saw an old friend.

As an elf, Legolas's instincts about the plants and animals of Middle-earth are usually sound. His insistence that the horses weren't frightened suggests to the reader that there might be something more going on in Fangorn forest than the Three Hunters are yet aware of. This understanding gives Legolas reason to be hopeful, though Gimli, still firmly pessimistic, is convinced that Saruman is causing mischief for them.



After a long search, Aragorn finds a mallorn-leaf with crumbs of **lembas** stuck to it and pieces of cut rope. He reads the clues and decides that at least one of the hobbits must have escaped into the forest. As they follow the trail to the bank of the Entwash and farther into Fangorn, Legolas remarks that the forest doesn't seem evil, despite what the stories say, though it does seem tense and so old that it makes Legolas feel young. They find the place where Merry and Pippin drank from the stream and climb the same hill where the hobbits met Treebeard.

From the top of the hill, Legolas sees a bent old man wearing gray rags and leaning on a staff. Gimli suddenly shouts that the old man is Saruman and urges Legolas to prepare his bow and shoot. Legolas readies his bow slowly, but doesn't shoot the old man, instead watching to see what he'll do. Aragorn agrees that they can't shoot at the old man without challenging him first.

The old man reaches the bottom of the hill and looks up. He is hooded, and the three companions can't see his face, but Aragorn catches a glimpse of keen eyes. The old man greets them as friends, claiming he wishes to speak with them, and begins to climb up the hill. Gimli again urges Legolas to shoot, but Legolas drops his bow when the old man tells him to put it away. When the old man tells Gimli to take his hand away from his axe, Gimli is suddenly stuck in place. Beneath the old man's gray clothes, there is a flash of white as he hops up to the top of the hill and steps over to meet them.

The old man greets them again and asks what they're doing in Fangorn. Aragorn asks the old man what his name is and what he wants to say to them. The old man responds that he already said what he wanted to say: what are they doing, and what is the story behind it? He tells them that they've heard his name before. When the three companions are silent, the old man reveals that he knows they're tracking hobbits and that he has news about them. As the old man sits, his grey cloak falls back, revealing his white clothes beneath. The three companions are suddenly able to move again, arming themselves quickly.

Gimli lunges for the old man with his axe, demanding to know where the hobbits are. The old man leaps away, onto a large rock, suddenly appearing taller. As he raises his staff, his hood and cloak fall away, and Gimli's axe is pulled from his hand. Aragorn's sword blazes with fire and Legolas cries "Mithrandir!" The three companions are stunned into silence until Aragorn finally says, "What veil was over my sight? Gandalf!"

As the lembas fortified the hobbits during their escape, the mere sight of its wrappings now gives the Three Hunters new energy and enthusiasm in their search, proving that at least one hobbit escaped slaughter with the orcs. Legolas has a great sympathy for the natural world and its emotions. He can tell that, though it has suffered from the decline of Middle-earth, it hasn't become as entirely corrupted as Celeborn implied to them earlier.



Gimli's urgent desire to find the hobbits, his worry, and his hopelessness impair his judgement towards the end of the Three Hunters' search. Hasty and violent, he wants to achieve their goal of rescuing the hobbits with no thought of the propriety or courtesy he otherwise values. Aragorn and Legolas, who have a stronger capacity for hope and patience, are less eager for an unprompted fight.



The old man is both jovial and disturbing. His words have incredible power and the clothes beneath his gray cloak are white. Both the voice and the color white are characteristic of Saruman, who the Three Hunters know has been haunting this area. His disguise and their own wariness make it difficult for the Three Hunters to determine whether he's an ally as he claims or an enemy as he appears.



The old man is conversationally vague and evasive in a way that, as he tells them, they have heard before. He knows information about the hobbits that would be incredibly dangerous in the hands of Saruman—it sounds to the Three Hunters like he's threatening Merry and Pippin's safety. Though the old man hasn't revealed his identity, with another flash of his white clothes, the Three Hunters can be fairly certain that he's their enemy, Saruman.



In an unexpected turn of events, Gandalf, who fell with the Balrog into a chasm in Moria in [The Fellowship of the Ring](#), is alive and has returned to aid his friends. From this brief introduction, Gandalf appears not to have changed much besides his clothes in his absence. He still enjoys puzzling his friends with his elusive words and masked identity.



Gandalf repeats his name as though only just remembering it and pulls his grey cloak on again. He urges the three companions to be happy that they've met again as "the great storm is coming, but the tide has turned." Gimli laughs to see Gandalf dressed in white rather than grey and Gandalf answers that he has become what Saruman should have been. He urges them to tell him about themselves.

Gandalf didn't rescue the hobbits and didn't know they'd been taken by orcs until an eagle told him—the same eagle Legolas saw three days before. Gandalf knows some of what happened while he was gone, but not everything. He knows that the **Ring** was almost revealed to Sauron and helped to protect it by fighting Sauron mentally. Gimli asks how Frodo is, but Gandalf doesn't know. Frodo was saved from danger that time, but there is more ahead on his path to Mordor. Gandalf is pleased, but not surprised, to hear that Sam went with Frodo.

Aragorn summarizes the travels of the Fellowship after Gandalf's death, and Gandalf realizes that Aragorn is omitting Boromir's weakness in trying to take the Ring from Frodo. Gandalf remarks that he's glad the hobbits joined the Fellowship for Boromir's sake, then speaks aloud to himself about the hobbits' role in Fangorn and the fate of Isengard. Aragorn doesn't understand and tells Gandalf that he still speaks "in riddles."

Gandalf explains that, while Sauron knows the **Ring** is in the possession of a hobbit, he doesn't know the purpose of the Company and thinks they're traveling to Minas Tirith to use the Ring against him in battle. Sauron hasn't yet considered that they might destroy the Ring and, instead, prepares his forces for war. Saruman is a traitor to both Sauron and Gandalf—he desires the Ring for himself and uses his influence to prevent Rohan from riding to aid Gondor. Now that Sauron knows that two hobbits were being taken to Isengard, he will see Saruman as an enemy as well. Gandalf also mentions that Saruman, concerned with the whereabouts of the Ring and the danger of Théoden taking it, forgot about the closer threat of Treebeard.

Gandalf is one of Middle-earth's greatest counselors. His return in itself brings the Three Hunters joy, but it also means that their chances of success against Sauron have increased. Gandalf's return is a first sign of the eventual restoration of Middle-earth: after falling, he emerges more powerful than before, wearing white as the new head of the Order of Wizards. His remark about Saruman suggests that had the wizard made different choices, he, too, could have been a force for good.



Even when he was not physically with the Fellowship, Gandalf was watching out for them, collecting news and shielding them from Sauron's eye. Still, he isn't omniscient. He was able to help Frodo once at Amon Hen, but now, it seems, Frodo and Sam really are alone for the remainder of their quest and must face Mordor's dangers without the Fellowship's aid. It's an ominous thought. Still, Frodo has Sam, whose devotion to his duty Gandalf doesn't doubt.



Gandalf implies that it was Merry and Pippin that saved Boromir from himself and from the Ring's corruption. Boromir's love for them and his unselfish desire to defend them redeemed him after his betrayal, allowing him to die a hero. Though Boromir's weaknesses overpowered him, they didn't define him, thanks to the happy and loving influence of the hobbits. Their simple actions have results beyond anyone's imagining; now, Saruman might fall because of their accidental meeting with Treebeard and encouragement of his plan to march to war.



Sauron's understanding of power as absolute and individual, while it makes him a formidable opponent, can also be a weakness. Because he can't understand other concepts of power (as something shared and beneficial, for instance), he can't even conceive of the possibility that someone would seek to destroy the Ring, an object of incredible power. Saruman, who sees power the same way as Sauron, acts exactly as Sauron expects the men of Gondor and Rohan to act—he seeks to take the Ring and use it for himself. Saruman is also blinded by his desire for the power of the Ring, overlooking and underestimating his enemies closer at hand.



Gandalf confirms for Gimli that it was Saruman that they saw at the edge of their fire the night before. He also tells them that the hobbits are with the ents, to the amazement of Aragorn and Legolas, who know the ents as an ancient legend. Treebeard is the oldest ent and the oldest living thing walking on Middle-earth. Gimli protests that he thought Fangorn was dangerous, but Gandalf calls all of them, himself included, dangerous if provoked. Gandalf foretells that the ents are about to remember that they are strong, but he doesn't know what will happen in Isengard and doesn't think the ents know themselves.

Aragorn asks if they should follow the hobbits and meet Treebeard, but Gandalf says that he will take him to speak to Théoden instead. They must all prepare for war against Mordor without the help of the **Ring**, which is now beyond their reach. Gandalf urges Aragorn not to regret the choice he made to follow Merry and Pippin rather than Frodo and Sam—it was a just choice. Aragorn promises to go with Gandalf, the two of them looking large and powerful as they stand together. Aragorn says that though Mordor has Nine Riders, they have One White Rider, Gandalf. Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli agree to follow him to Rohan.

Before they depart, Legolas and Gimli ask what happened to Gandalf after they parted. He tells his story: he fell a long way into darkness and was burned by the Balrog, then fell into deep water and nearly froze. Gandalf fought the Balrog at the bottom of the abyss and then up a secret pathway to Durin's tower. Gandalf threw the Balrog down the tower and killed it, and then his mind strayed through time. He was "sent back" to the mountaintop to finish his task on Middle-earth, where he lay until Gwaihir the eagle found him and carried him away to Lothlórien.

There, Galadriel healed him and gave him white clothes before sending him with messages. To Aragorn, she asks where his kinfolk the Dúnedain are and advises him that the "Dead watch the road that leads to the Sea." She warns Legolas that if he hears a seagull cry, his heart will no longer rest in the forests of his home. Gimli asks if there is a message for him, and Legolas wonders why he would want one, since Galadriel's words are dark and confusing. When Gimli insists that he wants a message from her no matter what she might say, Gandalf suddenly remembers a message for him, though it isn't in verse like the other two. Galadriel sends a simple greeting to Gimli and urges him to put his axe against the right tree.

Though Gimli has been suspicious and eager to see enemies in potential allies, he wasn't wrong to be wary, since Saruman actually was watching them. However, he doesn't need to be so suspicious of Fangorn forest, which has the potential for good, evil, danger, and kindness—like any other living thing. Though Fangorn has a fierce reputation, the ents, newly roused to anger by Treebeard, don't know their own power and danger. Time will tell who prevails in the coming battle at Isengard.



With Gandalf's return, Aragorn finally receives assurance that, though the decision was painful, he made the correct choice in following Merry and Pippin. Now that the temptation to use the Ring in battle has been removed, it is more essential than ever for all of Middle-earth to unite against the enemy that seeks to subjugate and destroy them. To this end, they must now convince Théoden to join the fight and share the burden of protecting the world.



Gandalf doesn't give precise details of what happened to him after his fight with the Balrog. He has knowledge of the workings of the world that none of his companions possess and powers beyond their understanding. All they—and the reader—need to know is that he fulfilled his duty in protecting the Fellowship from the Balrog, and has now been allowed the opportunity to continue that duty by aiding Middle-earth in the coming war.



Galadriel's messages are cryptic, but they contain encouraging hints. She gives Aragorn a clue about where to find allies against Sauron: in his own scattered people, the Dúnedain. She gives Legolas a warning that his travels and his experiences in this war will fundamentally change him. Gimli, still besotted with Galadriel, desperately wants a message. The fact that Gandalf only remembers the message for Gimli after he asks for it, and that it contains basically the same words he said to Gimli earlier about being careful with his axe, implies that Gandalf might have invented a message from Galadriel to make Gimli happy.



Gandalf whistles three times and calls three horses—the two that Éomer gifted to the Three Hunters and Shadowfax, the lord of horses, which Gandalf will ride into battle. He explains that the Rohirrim's horses had fled the night before to meet Shadowfax, their leader. Gandalf asks the horses for permission to ride quickly to the house of Théoden. They ride as the sun sets towards the Gap of Rohan. Legolas sees smoke blocking the sun and asks what it might be. Gandalf replies, “battle and war!” and the companions ride on.

Gandalf's respect for the horses of Rohan reveals his understanding of the inherent worth of all living things on Middle-earth, even the animals and plants. Shadowfax belongs to no one but himself and permits Gandalf to ride him as an ally and friend. The evening looks hopeful for the four friends, since they have a new goal and the hobbits are safe. Still, there is trouble on the horizon; the natural landscape reflects the turmoil in Rohan as smoke obscures the sun.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 6

The Three Hunters sleep briefly while Gandalf stands watch and wake up to ride again before sunrise. In the dawn, Legolas can see the mead hall of Théoden, called the Meduseld, and other settlements around it. Gandalf urges them not to draw any weapons as they ride towards it so the Rohirrim don't mistake them for enemies. They pass the barrows in the ground where five hundred years of Théoden's ancestors are buried. Legolas calls it a short time for the elves, but Aragorn reminds him that, to the men of Rohan, the founding of their land is only remembered in songs.

The ordinary passage of time is another factor that contributes to Middle-earth's decline, especially in the kingdoms of men. Human memory is much shorter than the memory of the elves. Generations of men have lived and died in Legolas's lifetime alone, and some of their wisdom and teachings have been lost along the way, existing now only in stories. This fact suggests that as history fades into legend, men tend to lose their moral bearings, too.



At the gates of the city of Edoras, a guard stops them in the language of Rohan. Gandalf understands the language but asks why they don't speak the Common Tongue. Théoden has ordered that only friends who know their language are allowed through the gate. Aragorn explains that they're returning the horses lent to them by Éomer, but the guard says that Wormtongue told him not to let strangers in. Gandalf sends the guard to tell Théoden, and not Wormtongue, that they're here to speak to him. The guard returns some time later and brings them in, warning that they can't bring any weapons into the hall.

Théoden's orders that only friends be allowed entry to the city is an example of the harmful insularity that's taken hold in the kingdoms of men. In a time when the world should be banding together against their shared enemy, Rohan is closing its gates and allowing only its own people entry. The fact that these orders were given by Wormtongue—whom Gandalf seems to particularly dislike—is another indication that something might be wrong in Théoden's house.



The companions climb the stairs to the Meduseld and are stopped by the doorward Háma. Aragorn is unwilling to leave his sword Andúril behind, but eventually sets it against the wall, warning the guard not to touch it. Háma is amazed by the legendary weapons that Legolas, Aragorn, and Gandalf leave with him. Gandalf refuses to go in without his staff, claiming that he's old and needs the support. Háma trusts that Gandalf is a friend of Théoden and allows him to carry the staff into the hall.

Háma's curiosity and wonder parallel Éomer's interest in the legends of the past visible in Aragorn and his companions. This interest reveals Rohan's deep appreciation for stories and legends as a society, though not all the men of Rohan still revere stories as their ancestors did. Háma, also like Éomer, is trusting enough of Aragorn and his friends—and relies enough on his own proper judgement of his duty—that he's willing to bend the rules for them and allow Gandalf to carry his staff into the hall.



Théoden, bent with age, sits on a dais at the far side of the hall with a woman wearing white and a man with a pale face. Gandalf greets Théoden, who calls him a “herald of woe” and asks why he should welcome him. The pale man agrees, mentioning that five days prior Théoden’s son Théodred was killed in battle, and names Gandalf *Láthspell*, or Ill-news. Gandalf tells Théoden that his hall isn’t as courteous as it used to be and the pale man, Wormtongue, asks if it’s true that Gandalf is in league with “the Sorceress of the Golden Wood.”

Gandalf sings a song praising Galadriel before throwing off his grey cloak and standing up straight. He tells Wormtongue to be silent, then raises his staff as thunder rolls and clouds cover the sun, darkening the hall. Wormtongue cries that Háma has betrayed them by not taking Gandalf’s staff from him, then there is a flash like lightning and Wormtongue sprawls on the ground. The darkness clears away as Gandalf points his staff at a window, and he tells Théoden to have courage and take his counsel. He says that Théoden has sat in the shadows and taken evil advice for too long.

Théoden slowly stands and the woman behind him takes his arm as he walks down the dais. Gandalf knocks on the doors and shouts for them to open for the Lord of the Mark. He tells the woman—Éowyn, Théoden’s niece—to send the guards down the stairs. Gandalf will help Théoden walk. Aragorn first sees Éowyn as she glances back, and he thinks that she looks beautiful and cold. She also notices Aragorn, pauses, then leaves.

Gandalf takes Théoden to look out at his land, and Théoden realizes it isn’t as dark as he’d thought. Gandalf tells him that he isn’t as frail as Wormtongue has made him think, either, and urges him to “cast aside” his age. Théoden drops his staff and stands up straight, feeling like he’s woken up from a dark dream. Still, he is afraid that Gandalf has come too late to save Rohan.

Gandalf tells Théoden to call for Éomer, who was imprisoned for threatening to kill Wormtongue. Théoden sends Háma as an errand-runner, since he was not trustworthy as a doorward. Théoden smiles at Gandalf, and many of the lines on his face vanish. Gandalf quickly explains the situation of the war with Mordor to Théoden—the enemy is strong, but Rohan and Gondor are not alone. Their greatest hope (the **Ring**-bearer) is traveling east into Mordor, and all they have to do is remain unconquered until his quest is complete. They all look to the east, thinking of Frodo, and Legolas thinks he can see a tiny red flame in the distance.

Courtesy can be an important indicator of morality in Middle-earth, and Gandalf finds it lacking in Rohan. After Théoden greets Gandalf, it’s Wormtongue who takes over, speaking for him and throwing dark accusations at Gandalf. This behavior indicates an unusual distribution of power in Théoden’s hall—even in his own home, the king doesn’t speak for himself.



Though Gandalf has the power to summon darkness as a display of strength, he is also quick to bring light back into the hall, both literally and figuratively, revealing that Wormtongue has been poisoning Théoden’s thoughts and giving him bad counsel. This, it seems, is the root of what has gone wrong in Rohan. Rather than taking active charge of his country, Théoden has been weary and passive, allowing Wormtongue to isolate Rohan and work evil.



It’s noteworthy that, as Théoden stands to retake command of Rohan, he physically leans on Éowyn and Gandalf, the two people he’s soon to turn to for advice and support. Éowyn is a capable Lady of Rohan and a shrewd judge of character. She notices Aragorn’s power and nobility almost immediately, though it’s hidden beneath his appearance as a ranger.



Wormtongue has forced Rohan into a sharp decline and has done the same to Théoden as a king and a person, driving him into hopelessness and despair. Gandalf helps him recognize that neither Rohan nor Théoden himself is as corrupted as Wormtongue would like him to believe. Still, Théoden’s despair is deep, and it isn’t entirely alleviated by Gandalf’s reassurances.



Gandalf begins to right the wrongs that have taken hold of Rohan, freeing Théoden from the weight of his age, freeing Éomer from imprisonment, and arming his allies with one of the most vital tools against their enemy: hope. Rohan is not alone, despite Wormtongue’s efforts to close its borders. As Rohan emerges from its isolation and joins its allies, so will others gather to defend Middle-earth while Frodo undertakes his quest.



Théoden grieves that he won't have peace in his old age and that the young are dying in the conflict. Gandalf suggests that he would feel stronger holding a sword, and Éomer, freed and armed by Háma, offers Théoden his. As Théoden lifts it, strength returns to his arm. He shouts a call to arms in the language of Rohan, and the guards run in, amazed, to lay their swords at his feet. Gandalf counsels Théoden to trust Éomer, cast aside his fear, and face the war ahead by destroying Saruman and sending Rohan's women and children to safety. There is no time for rest—Rohan must ride to war today. Théoden will ride to war rather than lead the women away to safety, and Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli will accompany him.

Wormtongue is brought back into the hall, along with Théoden's sword, which Wormtongue had locked away and hidden. Wormtongue attempts to convince Théoden not to listen to Gandalf. Théoden offers Wormtongue the chance to ride with him to war and prove his loyalty, but Wormtongue asks to stay behind instead and be left in charge of Rohan in his absence. Tired of Wormtongue wasting their time, Gandalf asks what Saruman bribed him with. Gandalf guesses that Wormtongue was promised that he could take whatever treasure he wanted, as well as Éowyn, after Rohan fell, and suggests that Wormtongue return to Saruman now.

Wormtongue, enraged, spits at Théoden's feet and flees down the stairs. Théoden orders guards to follow him, give him a horse, and let him leave while ensuring that he doesn't harm anyone. Another guard washes the stones by Théoden's feet, and the four guests sit down with Éomer and Éowyn to eat. Gandalf explains that Wormtongue was once an ally of Rohan, but has been plotting Théoden's downfall for years, isolating him, poisoning him, and giving him bad advice. Théoden realizes that he owes his freedom to Éomer and Gandalf, and offers Gandalf a gift. Gandalf chooses Shadowfax, whom Théoden gives him happily, along with armor for Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas.

Éowyn offers wine to Théoden and then the guests, wishing them health and happiness. She pauses to look at Aragorn, who smiles at her. As he takes the cup, their hands meet, and he feels her trembling "at the touch." Troubled, he responds to her greeting but doesn't smile again.

Now that Théoden is freed from Wormtongue's influence, it's vital that he take up the duties that he abandoned. As he lifts Éomer's sword, he reclaims his position as Rohan's political and military leader—a heavy burden, especially for a man of his age. Still, he is devoted to defending Rohan and riding to war himself. In facing Saruman's armies, Théoden is reinforcing his own men, but he's also striking a blow against one of the enemies that seeks not only to destroy Rohan, but to subjugate the whole world.



Wormtongue has been preventing Théoden from attending to any of his duties primarily by the influence of his words, but also by locking away Théoden's sword, symbolically cutting him off from his armies and the battles already raging in his own land. In doing so, he has effectively been using Théoden as a figurehead and ruling Rohan himself. Now, rather than trusting in Théoden's mercy or changing his ways, Wormtongue continues to reach for power by taking advantage of Théoden's proposed absence from his hall.



Gandalf reveals that Wormtongue was tempted away from true loyalty to Rohan by Saruman, who took advantage of Wormtongue's greed, lust, and desire for power. Boromir, who was tempted in much the same way as Wormtongue, proved that it's possible to repent after wrongdoing and make up for past mistakes; but when offered the opportunity to do so, Wormtongue doesn't accept. With Wormtongue gone, Théoden's hall returns suddenly to its former courtesy, indicating that Wormtongue's corrupting effect was relatively superficial. Théoden acknowledges his mistakes and debts and offers food and gifts to his guests.



Éowyn's role as the cup-bearer is another indication of a return to the past courtesy of the hall, which is reminiscent of Anglo-Saxon mead halls where the female relatives of the king would offer wine to the king's soldiers. Here, the narrator foreshadows a connection between Éowyn, who appears both interested and intimidated, and Aragorn. Though it's unclear why Aragorn would be troubled by Éowyn's interest in him, it's apparent that he doesn't want to encourage it.



Théoden announces that, since he's riding to battle for what is probably the last time and his son is dead, Éomer is his heir. He asks who will stay behind from the fighting to rule the people in his place, but no one volunteers. Háma says that the people trust the House of Eorl, but Théoden argues that they need Éomer in the battle. Háma didn't mean Éomer, but his sister, Éowyn, "fearless and high-hearted." Théoden agrees, and Éowyn kneels to receive a sword and armor.

Théoden says goodbye to Éowyn, since he might not return, and reminds her that any survivors of the battle will meet her and the noncombatants at Dunharrow. She tells him not to talk about defeat, and that every day he's gone will feel like a year. As she says it, she looks at Aragorn, standing nearby. Aragorn assures her that the king will come back, and that the greatest danger isn't in Isengard.

As they set off, Gimli complains again about riding and fighting from horseback. Éowyn stands alone in the doorway of the hall holding her sword. Over a thousand men and horses are gathered to leave, cheering as Théoden walks out. Éomer, riding up, makes peace with Gimli after their previous argument about Galadriel and invites Gimli to ride with him. Gimli agrees, if Legolas can ride beside them. Gandalf calls Shadowfax and throws back his grey cloak, revealing his white clothes beneath.

Shouting for the king and the White Rider, "the last host of Rohan" thunders across the fields. Éowyn, still standing alone in the doorway of the silent hall, watches them ride away.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 7

The host of Rohan rides hard through the evening, then stops for five hours to make camp before setting off again. Ahead, towards Isengard, Legolas can see darkness, and shapes moving near the river, but no details. There is a veil of shadow over the land. The air feels hotter and heavier as they ride, and the afternoon brings dark clouds.

In Théoden's absence, Éowyn is trusted with leadership over Rohan. She's chosen because of her high rank, but also because of her own capability. The men of Rohan are eager to follow Théoden to war, not to take up the duty of ruling the women and elderly. Despite the fact that Éowyn's new position isn't coveted by anyone other than Wormtongue, she is particularly qualified for it, possessing all the characteristics and courtesy of Middle-earth's past heroes.



Théoden, much like the ents marching to Isengard, is aware that he might die in the battle. Still, he feels duty-bound to go and do good for the world, comforted by the knowledge that even if he and the riders of Rohan are defeated, the kingdom will live on, led by Éowyn. Moreover, Aragorn reminds Éowyn that Saruman isn't Rohan's, or Middle-earth's, gravest threat—Sauron is, he implies.



Now that Rohan is beginning to heal itself from Wormtongue's influence and its decline, Éomer has more attention to give to courtesy, reconciling with Gimli. Théoden's men are rallied behind him, enthusiastic to see their king leading them again and hopeful for the coming battle.



The chapter concludes with images of finality. The host that departs from Edoras is the last host of Rohan, whether that will be because of Sauron's success or Rohan's slow decline. The narrator doesn't indicate what Éowyn is thinking about as she watches them depart, but it is noteworthy that she's holding the sword given to her by Théoden, despite being left behind with no opportunity to use it. Though her duty is to stay and care for Rohan in Théoden's absence, her sword and her long look may indicate her desire for a different duty—to ride to battle as part of Rohan's last host.



Once again, the land reveals the corruption of its leaders. Towards Isengard, the natural world is dark and inhospitable, lacking in the light and beauty that indicate goodness, hope, and clarity. Even Legolas, with his elven eyesight, can't penetrate the darkness.



A horseman rides towards them, asking for Éomer. He says they've come too late—Rohan's forces were driven back yesterday and lost many men. The remaining men, led by Erkenbrand, the lord of Westfold, are heading to Helm's Deep to seek shelter. There is no hope ahead. Théoden calls the rider by name and tells him that they will not return home without a battle. The rider kneels in wonder, and Théoden offers him a fresh horse as they ride to aid Helm's Deep.

Gandalf tells Théoden that he has to leave with Shadowfax on an errand and to wait for him at Helm's Deep, then rides swiftly away. One of the guards asks Háma what it means. Háma has no explanation besides the fact that Gandalf always comes and goes abruptly. The other guard mutters that Wormtongue would have found an explanation, but Háma prefers to wait for Gandalf to explain for himself. The other guard suggests that Háma might wait a long time.

The host of Rohan rides into the night towards Helm's Deep, a fortified gorge in the hills protecting an ancient tower. They hear horn blasts and cries from the scouts ahead of them, who report a host of orcs far outnumbering them heading for Helm's Deep. The scouts have also seen some of their own scattered companies, but no one has heard from Erkenbrand, and they fear that he and his men will be overtaken by orcs before they can reach Helm's Deep, if they're not already dead. Several people have seen Gandalf passing by (though some of them thought he was Saruman) and also Wormtongue, heading north with a company of orcs. Éomer urges them to hurry on despite the danger, but he fears it won't be long before Saruman knows they're marching to Helm's Deep.

As they ride through the dark, Aragorn looks back at the torches behind them, betraying the sheer size of the orc army. The orcs are burning the land as they pass through it. Aragorn hates to run from them and let them destroy houses and crops, but the host of Rohan is too outnumbered to turn and fight, even once they reach the outer ramparts of Helm's Deep.

For Rohan's recently defeated forces, all hope is lost. Even if they take shelter in Helm's Deep, the orc host is too powerful, some of their forces are lost, and Éomer's men alone can't meaningfully offer them aid. The sight of Théoden doesn't materially change the difficulties they face, but it awes the rider, giving him enough hope to persist in his duty of defending Rohan from Saruman's orcs.



Despite Wormtongue's removal, his influence remains. Wormtongue ensured that Théoden and many of his men mistrusted Gandalf, and some of them still do, despite his hand in Théoden's recovery. It will take time to restore Rohan to its former morality, if it's possible to restore it completely at all. Still, there are those like Háma actively working to improve the attitudes of his fellow countrymen and persuade them towards trust, collaboration, and hope for the future.



As the rider searching for Éomer reported, the situation looks dire. Rohan's forces are small and scattered, and they're facing a powerful enemy. In the absence of Erkenbrand and the sight of so many enemies, the morale of the men is low, and even Éomer fears there might be worse to come. Théoden's resolve and their commitment to their duty compels them to continue on to Helm's Deep, but there is little optimism to be found among the ranks.



The orcs don't just attack the men of Rohan on Saruman's orders, they also needlessly destroy the land itself, leaving burning wastes behind them. Saruman and his orcs actively and intentionally demolish the natural world, whether as a demoralizing tactic, a practical war strategy to destroy crops and supplies, or from simple malice.



The host of Rohan reaches Helm's Dike, an ancient trench and rampart, and a sentinel challenges them. Éomer answers that Théoden rides to their aid, and the sentinel hurries them in, calling their arrival "good tidings beyond hope." Because Erkenbrand left men to guard Helm's Deep and scattered companies have made their way back after the battle, there are about a thousand men in the fortress able to fight. In the caves of Helm's Deep, civilians from the surrounding land are sheltering with a store of food and animals.

Théoden and his riders are happily welcomed and begin arranging the defense of Helm's Deep with the bulk of the forces set behind the Deeping Wall, a twenty-foot battlement set with slits for shooting through. Gimli and Legolas stand on top of the wall and anticipate the battle to come, wishing for more allies. Suddenly, there are screams from the Dike and the guards retreat into the fortress. They shot every arrow they had and filled the Dike with corpses, but the orcs are climbing the bank.

It's a dark night, and a flash of lightning illuminates hundreds of orcs pouring into the space between the Dike and the Deeping Wall. The orcs send arrows as "thick as the rain" over the battlements, but Helm's Deep makes no responding attack. The orcs hesitate, then charge the gates, and are met with a volley of arrows and stones from the wall. Over and over in waves, the orcs break and flee, then charge again. Each time they charge, they reach a higher point on the wall. They bring battering rams to attack the gates. Fighting beside the orcs are the wild men of Dunland, who Saruman has manipulated into joining his armies.

Éomer and Aragorn, standing together on the wall, see the trouble at the gates and run to assist, gathering a few other swordsmen as they go. From the wall and tower, men cheer for Andúril, the sword that was broken, returned to war. They attack the wild men carrying the battering rams and press them back. A lightning strike breaks the shield wall around the battering rams and the orc archers flee.

Surveying the bent and cracked gates, Éomer realizes that they can't defend the walls from behind them. As the orcs gather to charge again, the men of Rohan rush to fortify the gates with beams and stones. A dozen orcs, hiding among the dead, attempt to ambush Éomer, but Gimli beheads two and the rest flee. Éomer thanks Gimli for his aid. Returning to his place on the wall, Gimli gives Legolas the count of his kills: "two!" Legolas replies that he's killed at least twenty with his arrows, but that's still only a few compared to the host of enemies.

The forces already in Helm's Deep are a welcome addition to Rohan's ranks, but still not enough to easily defeat the orc armies. Still, Théoden's arrival gives the men trapped in the fortress a chance of driving the orcs back from Helm's Deep rather than simply sheltering with the civilians until their food runs out. Any chance, even a small one, is enough to improve their outlook and give them hope.



The orcs, hating sunlight, approach Helm's Deep and attack in the dark. The silent first attack is ghostly and sinister; the men in the fortress don't even know it's begun until they hear their own men screaming and retreating. Though Théoden's presence is heartening, it's clear that hope alone isn't enough to compete with the orcs' numbers.



The revelation that Saruman has men fighting in his armies in addition to his bloodthirsty orcs is ominous. Saruman's voice is a powerful manipulative force, and the realms of men are vulnerable to corruption. Now, rather than joining together with the other realms of men to fight against the oppression of Sauron and Saruman, the men of Dunland fight alongside orcs.



Hope is a powerful motivator, and legends are important to Rohan's culture. Though Théoden isn't yet fighting alongside his men, the sight of Aragorn's legendary sword returning to battle encourages them. The lightning strike proves again that the natural world of Middle-earth both recognizes the harm being done to it, and, occasionally, fights back.



Gimli heroically saves Éomer's life, then returns to Legolas to report on their somewhat unheroic game. The two of them have made a competition out of how many orcs they can kill. Legolas and Gimli aren't the solemn and honorable heroes of this battle, though they may perform heroic feats. They're joking and jovial, using their contest to press each other to be useful rather than noble.



The enemy seems to have grown, and the men of Rohan are weary, though Aragorn and Éomer rally them three times in a charge. A clamor rises from Helm's Deep when the orcs gain entry through the culvert where the stream flows out. Gimli and Legolas leap down to meet them. Together with the men of Westfold, they press the orcs back. Gimli continues counting his kills, then helps block up the culvert with stones. He finds Legolas on the wall and discovers that Legolas's number is still higher.

As dawn approaches, Éomer and Aragorn are exhausted, though Aragorn remarks that "dawn is the hope of men." He reminds the men of Rohan that no enemy has ever taken Helm's Deep. With a blare of trumpets, the stream bursts through the culvert again, blasting a hole large enough for orcs to pour through. Aragorn assumes that this is the work of Saruman and runs to fight. At the same time, the orcs set ladders against the battlements and climb up, overcoming the last defense and driving the men of Rohan back into Helm's Deep.

Aragorn holds back the enemy at the bottom of the stairs leading towards the back gate with the help of Legolas, who eventually calls Aragorn inside once everyone gets safely within the Hornburg, the stronghold of Helm's Deep. The battle is going badly, but Legolas still has hope since Aragorn is with them. Aragorn tells Legolas that Gimli was swept away from him by the enemy, and Legolas calls it "evil news"—he wanted to tell Gimli that his count is now 39.

Aragorn learns that Éomer hasn't reached the Hornburg and was last seen fighting in the mouth of the Deep with Gimli. Aragorn finds Théoden and reports that, while they have supplies to shelter in Helm's Deep, the orcs have enough blasting fire to either force their way in or seal up the exits. Théoden is restless trapped inside, and now questions Gandalf's wisdom in sending them here. He decides to ride out to face the enemy, an act worthy of a song, and Aragorn agrees to go with him.

The riders of Rohan are weary in both body and spirit. No matter how many times Aragorn and Éomer attempt to raise their spirits and motivate them, the orcs keep coming. Legolas and Gimli have energy to spare, working as a team and motivating each other (and the men around them) with their fervor and humor. Gimli's competitive spirit—combined with his genuine enjoyment of an opportunity to use his axe—makes him a fierce adversary for the orcs.



Aragorn, though physically tired, hasn't lost hope. As he did many times while trying to rescue the hobbits, he waits for the dawn to provide him with clarity and the hope of finding some advantage. Though he encourages himself and the men to keep their spirits up, Saruman has finally discovered their presence and added his magic to the fight. Their odds are growing worse as they lose ground, and it is unclear what advantage the dawn can possibly bring them.



Though the fight is growing dire, Legolas hasn't entirely lost his hope, which Aragorn's presence brings him, or his sense of humor. Legolas doesn't tire as easily as his companions and doesn't quickly become weary of mind. Aragorn's conversation with the elf enlivens him, providing a brief respite from the deadly serious night.



Théoden means to make this charge his last—one massive attack that will either win the battle or end in their deaths. Trapped in the fortress and faced with hopeless odds, Théoden seeks consolation against despair. While Legolas and Gimli use humor to fortify themselves, Théoden turns to action. He can't bear to be idle with his thoughts and doesn't have the same hope for the dawn that Aragorn still holds. And though he invokes the idea of song, it is this desire to take action, besides the obvious necessity of defeating Saruman's armies, that leads him to make the charge, not any true hope of glory. It's likely that, after the charge, there won't be anyone left alive to tell the tale. Like Aragorn does when urging Legolas and Gimli to run swiftly after the hobbits during their hunt, Théoden speaks of a song as a sort of pledge to act in a way worthy of singing about.



Aragorn stands above the gates and tells the jeering orcs that he's looking out to see the dawn. He warns them to leave or be killed, and his power is so visible that the wild men of Dunland pause before the orcs laugh and shoot at him. Aragorn jumps down and runs into the tower as the gate is blasted open. As the orcs prepare to charge, they hear murmurs of dismay from behind them and then the great horn of the Helm blasting from the tower.

The orcs that hear the horn tremble, and many cover their ears as it echoes out of the Deep. The men on the walls listen with wonder and rally around Théoden, charging from the tower with Aragorn at his side. They ride down the hosts of Isengard with every man still left and the enemy flees from them. The men of Rohan reach the Dike, then halt. Before, the land outside the Dike was grassy hills, but now it's covered in a looming forest where the orcs run to hide.

Suddenly, Gandalf appears on a ridge, bright white in the rising sun. Behind him is Erkenbrand, leading a thousand men, who stops at the edge of the valley and blows his horn. The men of Rohan at the Dike cheer for him, and Aragorn and Legolas call out to Gandalf. Théoden rides down out of the Dike and Erkenbrand charges down from the hills with Gandalf, driving the terrified hosts of Isengard farther into the trees. No orcs ever emerge from the forest.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 8

That morning, Théoden and Gandalf reunite, along with Aragorn, Legolas, and Erkenbrand. Éomer and Gimli, who had been driven back into the Deep, emerge also, Gimli announcing his final number of 42. It beats Legolas's score by one, but Legolas is so pleased to see him unharmed that he doesn't mind losing the game. Gandalf reveals that he wasn't the one who brought the forest to Helm's Deep and says he could better explain who did if Théoden and the others will follow him to Isengard.

Though the men of Dunland have allied themselves with Saruman rather than their fellow men, Aragorn offers them a chance of redemption: to flee before the final charge. Though moved by Aragorn's words and frightened by his manner, they are ultimately reassured by the jeering of the orcs who, like Wormtongue, reject the opportunity to change allegiance.



Though the orcs have spent the night confident in their victory, the noise of the horn unsettles them. At the sound, the men of Rohan grow in confidence while the orcs become increasingly afraid. The blast of the horn and the leadership of the king incite the riders of Rohan to a massive charge, driving the orcs entirely out of Helm's Deep.



With the dawn, as Aragorn hoped, comes reinforcements. His optimism wasn't misplaced, and neither was Háma's trust in Gandalf. Gandalf's arrival—just in time to further inspire the men and finish the battle—is a sudden narrative turn for the better; Tolkien called this phenomenon "eucatastrophe." Again, the landscape of Middle-earth has changed itself to oppose its oppressors. From the land the orcs burned, a forest has appeared like a third army to cut off their escape.



Though Legolas and Gimli's competition was useful to keep them moving and playful during the battle, the actual outcome matters less than their safety and Rohan's success. Legolas isn't upset to lose because the object of the competition wasn't actually to win. The appearance of the forest is a true mystery; if Gandalf didn't bring it with him, it appears to the men of Rohan that Middle-earth itself sent them a forest to kill the orcs.



They rest, then depart in the evening with a hand-picked group of riders. Though the orcs are all dead, some of the wild men beg for mercy. The men of Rohan disarm them and make them swear to never march to war again. The dead riders of Rohan are buried in two mounds in the field in front of the Hornburg. They dig a separate grave for Háma, who died defending the gate. The orcs are piled up in heaps too big to burn.

Gandalf leads the way through the shadowy forest towards Isengard, leaving behind the people of Westfold, who sing a victory song. Gandalf thinks that no one will ever know what happened to the orcs when they ran into the forest. Legolas wants to talk to the trees; he senses wrath from them, but only towards orcs. Gimli urges him not to, explaining that he doesn't love trees. The dwarves find the same beauty in stones and caves that Elves find in forests. He tells Legolas about the beauty of Helms Deep's caverns and how much he'd like to carefully tend them, and though Legolas doesn't like caves any more than Gimli likes trees, he is moved by Gimli's passion. If they both survive the war, they decide to visit Fangorn and Helm's Deep again together.

As they pass out from beneath the trees, Legolas turns back to look and notices strange eyes watching them from the branches. Ents emerge from the forest, facing north towards more ents approaching. When the riders start to draw their swords, Gandalf assures them that the ents have no interest in harming them and explains what they are.

Though the ents are a legend to Théoden, Théoden and the land of Rohan are only fleeting stories in the long lives of the ents. Théoden realizes that men have been so caught up in their own affairs that they no longer listen to the old stories of their people and only teach them to children. This is "a careless custom," since now their legends walk among them.

The allied Free Peoples often offer lenience and mercy to the corrupted allies of Saruman and Sauron (in contrast to the harsher policies of the enemy), and the men of Dunland accept that mercy now. The orcs continue to be a plague on the natural landscape in death as they were in life, since the men of Rohan are unable to dispose of the bodies. Though Háma was demoted from doorward to messenger by Théoden, he ultimately died as a doorward—honorably defending an entryway.



In the wake of the battle, Legolas and Gimli have a friendly argument that emphasizes the natural beauty of Middle-earth. Though they each find beauty in different things—and can't understand the other's preferences—they pledge to visit both caves and forests together after the war to witness all the beauty the world has to offer. Legolas's love of trees and forests is well-established by now, but Gimli's passion for rocks and caverns is surprising to Legolas even after his raptures in the halls of Moria. His appreciation for stone is a reminder that all the natural world has value and deserves care and tending.



The trees really did march to battle like an army—they are huorns, a race of sentient trees cared for by the ents, and the same creatures that Pippin saw on the march to Isengard. The ents and the huorns are the representatives of the natural world in the battle against evil.



Here, Théoden realizes one of the greatest problems facing the realms of men—one contributing to their decline. Men are beginning to forget their past, discount their treasured stories, and ignore the world beyond their own borders. In doing so, they have lost knowledge, wisdom, and opportunities for recognizing the wonder and diversity of the world. Théoden is right to call it careless, and his recognition of the problem raises hope for future change.



Gandalf tells Théoden he should be glad that the lives of those legends are also threatened by Mordor, since it makes them allies in the war. Théoden argues that he should also be sad, since the war might end with the destruction of “much that was fair and wonderful.” The evil of Sauron can’t ever be fully erased from the world.

As they carry on towards Isengard, they notice that the springs of Isen are dried up as a result of Saruman’s corruption of the land. Théoden is distressed to ride past places where carrion birds swarm around fallen riders of Rohan, though Gandalf buried some of them while he was out on his errand gathering Erkenbrand’s scattered men the night before. When they stop for the night, Aragorn sees a column of smoke rising from Isengard, as if Saruman’s valley is burning. Éomer guesses that Saruman is creating some evil to stop them.

In the middle of the night, a watchman cries out, and the company wakes to hear whispering voices in the mist and feel the ground tremble, but eventually the voices pass and the sun rises. At the Hornburg, the men of Rohan also feel the earth move, but when the sun rises the piles of dead orcs have been buried in a huge pit, and the forest is gone. The trees are never seen near Helm’s Deep again—they have their revenge on the orcs and then return to Fangorn.

Gandalf and his companions pass into Saruman’s valley, covered over in fog. Though it was once green and beautiful, it’s now polluted and covered in brambles. When they approach the walls around Orthanc, Saruman’s tower, they find the doors of Isengard broken on the ground. The land inside the walls is flooded and full of debris. By the gate, the riders suddenly see two small figures surrounded by bottles and plates. Merry, who notices the riders first, stands to welcome them to Isengard, then tells them that Saruman is closed up in his tower with Wormtongue.

Gandalf laughs and greets Merry, then Gimli happily chides him for making the Three Hunters worry for the hobbits’ safety while they were there being “truants,” eating and smoking. Théoden recognizes Merry as a halfling, since his people have stories that they exist, though they don’t know anything specific about them. Treebeard has left a message for Théoden and Gandalf to meet him at the northern wall. As they ride away, the hobbits call Théoden very polite.

While Gandalf focuses on the positive aspects of the ents joining them in the fight against Sauron and Saruman, Théoden is struck suddenly by the underlying implication—that the ents, creatures of legend, are just as likely to be killed as the men of Rohan. Gandalf can’t disagree. The entire world, full of both human mundanity and strange, wonderful legends, is endangered. Even if they win the war, what survives might never completely recover.



Saruman exploits the natural world around him, chopping down trees and drying up rivers, to fuel his corrupt machine—the pits and forges around Isengard where he makes his weapons and gathers his armies. The land is also marred by Saruman’s influence in the corpses left by the battles and the smoke filling the sky.



The huorns, as representatives of the natural world, have disposed of the orcs’ bodies, burying them out of sight beneath the earth. What was too great a task for the men of Rohan is the work of a single night for the huorns. The force of their actions shakes the very ground as they clean up the pollution left behind by the orcs and travel back to their rightful home.



Finally, as the characters reach Isengard, the narrator describes exactly what Saruman has done to the once-beautiful land. Isengard is further wrecked and flooded by some influence other than Saruman’s—presumably, this was the work of the invading ents. Merry, cheerful as ever, pleased to see his friends, and apparently undaunted by the battle for Isengard, takes the opportunity to mock Saruman’s defeat while he greets the approaching riders.



After the hopelessness and distress of the past days for both the hobbits and the Three Hunters, their reunion is a joyful reprieve. The hobbits are safe, happily eating and smoking—some of their favorite pastimes, and their favorite shields against despair. Théoden meets another of Rohan’s legends in the hobbits and, open-minded about the truth of the old stories, actually identifies them, though few people do. Merry and Pippin note Théoden’s good manners, further indication of the return of courtesy to Rohan.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 9

Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas remain behind with the hobbits, who lead the way into Saruman's guard-house for lunch. Aragorn declares that the Three Hunters' hunt is over, now that they've met Merry and Pippin again. He notes that the hobbits look remarkably well, and Legolas attributes it to the water of the ents. They all sit down to eat together, and Pippin gives Gimli his spare pipe to smoke some leaf from near the Shire that they found in one of the barrels floating around after Isengard was flooded. Pippin asks if the gift of the pipe settles the score between them for the hobbits worrying him, and Gimli replies that it does, he is now in Pippin's debt.

They all return outside to the gateway and Aragorn, weary, stretches out his long legs to smoke. Pippin jokes that "Strider the Ranger has come back" and Aragorn replies that he never left. He is both Strider and Aragorn, and he belongs both to Gondor and the North.

They smoke in silence for a while until Legolas prompts the hobbits to tell the story of everything that's happened to them since they parted. Pippin begins the story nine days ago, though he remembers most of it like a bad dream and avoids going into detail about their captivity with the orcs.

Aragorn returns the hobbits' lost possessions, including Pippin's brooch, and the Three Hunters praise them for their resourcefulness in leaving clues and escaping the orcs. Aragorn feels uneasy about the orcs led by Grishnákh, believing that Sauron and his servants knew too much about the Fellowship's quest. The hobbits continue with the story to explain the ents' attack on Isengard.

The ents along with other mobile trees called huorns marched to Isengard, and waited as all of Saruman's forces departed to attack Rohan. The huorns followed the orcs, and the ents took the opportunity to hammer down the gates to Isengard. Saruman, who didn't anticipate the ents attacking, fled, panicked, into the tower. That night, to the astonishment of the hobbits, Gandalf appeared in a great hurry.

The hobbits take great comfort in the simple pleasures of food, rest, and leisurely smoking. Though such physical comforts seem low and modest compared to the mental defenses that men such as Aragorn have against despair—duty, purpose, and honor—the small joys of the hobbits reveal their deep appreciation for the fundamental necessities of life. Food and rest are basic things they need to survive, yet they make an occasion of them and take true pleasure in them. They offer these same comforts to the Three Hunters, who appreciate them similarly.



Whether Aragorn has deciphered Galadriel's message about the Dúnedain (the great albeit declining race of Men in the North) or simply has them on his mind, Aragorn emphasizes his dual loyalty to both them and the people of Gondor. Though his duties don't currently conflict, as they have previously, he remains aware that they could pull him in competing directions.



Hobbits are particularly resilient, able to recover from injury and despondency with relative ease. Pippin's cheerful temper and good mood—especially with plenty to eat and surrounded by friends—make him unwilling or unable to go into much detail about his captivity.



With the brooch, Pippin finally has confirmation that all his quick-thinking and persistent escape attempts with the orcs were useful. Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli really did come to rescue them, as he doubted would happen when in despair, and saw the sign he left for them. Without the brooch, the Three Hunters would have had no sign of Merry and Pippin until they reached Fangorn.



As Gandalf predicted, Saruman's preoccupation with his schemes for power made him vulnerable to the attack of the ents. Because Saruman stopped caring about his environment beyond how he could exploit it, he forgot about Treebeard and the forest. It was a fatal mistake that lost him control of Isengard as the forces of the natural world reclaimed it.



Rather than greeting Pippin, Gandalf called him a “tom-fool of a Took” and demanded to see Treebeard to ask for help with the ten thousand orcs attacking Helm’s Deep. When Pippin asked Gandalf where he’d been, Gandalf responded only that he was back and that news must wait, then rode away again. Treebeard wouldn’t tell them much, but the hobbits gathered that there was a great battle happening and worried about Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli. Later that night led by Treebeard, the ents broke the dams and poured water into Isengard to wash away “the filth of Saruman” and fill up the caves and fires. By morning, a dense fog rose and the water was steadily rising towards the guard room, so the hobbits took shelter on top of the arch. Eventually, the ents stopped the flow and returned the Isen to its normal course.

The hobbits spent a lonely night on the arch and woke to a peaceful morning. Gimli wonders how Wormtongue got into the tower with Saruman. Pippin explains that he arrived on horseback that morning after the return of the huorns and tried to flee once he saw the wreckage, but Treebeard picked him up and trapped him in the tower until Gandalf could arrive. After that Merry and Pippin went looking for supplies and found the food and pipe-weed. Aragorn finds it odd that there is pipe-leaf from near the Shire in Isengard and plans to mention it to Gandalf. Merry suggests that they go to find him and look around Isengard.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 10

The hobbits, the Three Hunters, Théoden, and Éomer follow Gandalf, who intends to speak to Saruman before they leave, up to the foot of the tower beneath the window. He warns them to be cautious—Saruman is dangerous—and then shouts for Saruman to come out. Wormtongue fetches Saruman, who asks why they disturb his rest in a smooth voice enchanted to sound pleasant and reasonable.

Saruman flatters and offer help to Théoden, who hesitates before Gimli breaks the silence and calls Saruman a liar. Saruman addresses Théoden again, asking to make peace with him, and again Théoden remains silent, struggling either with doubt or anger. Éomer, not fooled by Saruman, reminds Théoden of the deaths of Théodred and Háma, and asks if Théoden will make peace with a murderer. After Saruman tries to enchant Éomer, Théoden finally speaks, telling Saruman that there will be peace between Isengard and Rohan, but only when Saruman and all his plans are destroyed. His speech startles the riders of Rohan out of Saruman’s enchantment and enrages Saruman, who leans out the window and threatens their lives in a hissing voice.

Though the hobbits were overjoyed to see Gandalf alive, they were less pleased to be left uninformed. Since Treebeard and Gandalf lacked the time to tell them what was happening either in Isengard or Helm’s Deep, they were forced to stay out of the way and speculate, concerned for their friends. In battle, the hobbits couldn’t be of much direct help. Their role was to incite the battle and then to provide comfort for their friends afterwards. The ents use the natural world to their advantage when taking over Isengard. As the huorns kill orcs at Helm’s Deep, the river Isen itself clears away the pollution around the tower.



With the dawn comes peace and clarity. After the battle and their frightening night, the hobbits spend their time looking for ways to comfort themselves and discover the food and pipe-leaf. Pleased with their feast, they don’t think to wonder why Saruman would have pipe-leaf from the Shire. Aragorn feels bothered by this odd development, though he can’t quite say why, suggesting that there might be more to Saruman’s connection with the Shire than they yet know.



Though he continually seeks power, Wormtongue seems to occupy a perpetual role as a mouthpiece for more powerful men. Though Wormtongue had the power to influence Théoden with his voice, it was nothing compared to Saruman’s voice. Even trapped in his tower, Saruman has the ability to harm and influence his enemies.



The hotheads of the group—Gimli and Éomer—are best able to oppose Saruman’s influence, confident in their beliefs and in their grudges. Théoden, already proven to be susceptible to external influence, wavers under Saruman’s power and, for a moment, appears to be captured by it. However, he adheres to his duty and his purpose, arguing with Saruman as vehemently as Éomer does. The authority in his voice breaks the men of Rohan free from Saruman’s spell, even though it lacks magical power. This suggests that where power aims at dominance through manipulation, it’s ultimately less effective than power founded on integrity and respect for one’s people.



Using the power of his voice again, Saruman attempts to convince Gandalf that he regrets the harsh words of their last meeting and to cajole Gandalf into joining him and healing the world together. The listening riders of Rohan feel convinced that Gandalf will betray them and join Saruman, but Gandalf only laughs, breaking the spell again, and asks Saruman to come down from the tower. Saruman hesitates, then refuses, though Gandalf assures him that he won't harm him. Instead, he offers Saruman a chance to leave freely under his protection if Saruman gives up the key to the tower and his staff, to be returned to him later, if Saruman deserves them.

Saruman laughs at the offer and turns away from the window but is dragged back against his will when Gandalf shouts, "Come back, Saruman!" Gandalf declares that he is no longer Gandalf the Grey, but "Gandalf the White, who has returned from the dead." Gandalf casts Saruman out of the Council of Wizards and raises his hand to break Saruman's staff in two. As Saruman falls back into the tower, a heavy object thrown by Wormtongue falls from the window and strikes the stairs near Gandalf, breaking the stone. The object, a ball made of crystal with a glowing fire inside, is unharmed and rolls towards Pippin, who picks it up. Gandalf takes it from him quickly, wrapping it in his cloak. He comments that Saruman will be angry when he realizes what Wormtongue gave them.

They agree to leave before Wormtongue throws anything else down at them. Saruman's power is lessening and, though Gandalf can't destroy Orthanc, Sauron might be able to. Gandalf doesn't plan to do anything else with Saruman, but simply let him "fester" in his tower. Still, he hoped that Saruman might change his ways and join them since he would have been a powerful ally. Gandalf meets with Treebeard one more time and introduces him to the Three Hunters. Legolas praises Fangorn forest and asks permission to bring Gimli there. Treebeard is wary of a dwarf with an axe but agrees once he hears that Gimli killed 42 orcs at the battle of Helm's Deep. Treebeard promises to remember the hobbits in the ents' list of creatures and to ensure that Saruman doesn't escape Orthanc.

Already weakened by years of Wormtongue's persuasion, the men of Rohan are quick to believe that Gandalf might betray them. Still, Gandalf is a bearer of hope and comfort, and his laugh, a mark of joy, finally breaks Saruman's hold over the riders. Gandalf hopes that Saruman, who was once his friend and ally, will give up his pursuit of power, and offers him the chance to do so. Though Saruman has done evil in the world, he was once a truly righteous person; there is conflict in him, and hunger for power has made evil win that conflict in recent years. Still, if Saruman has been corrupted, he might be redeemed with the right help.



Saruman has no desire for repentance or for Gandalf's freely offered help. He doesn't trust Gandalf, expecting him to seek to empower and enrich himself, as Saruman himself would. Saruman no longer believes in selflessness, especially among the powerful. Since Saruman refuses to give up his power, Gandalf takes it from him, not to use for himself, but—in breaking the staff before Saruman's eyes—to remove from the world. Gandalf's haste to take the crystal ball from Pippin and his remark about its importance to Saruman indicate that it's both powerful and dangerous.



Gandalf reveals that he didn't only want Saruman to freely concede his power; he wanted him to change sides again and aid them in the fight for Middle-earth. Instead, Saruman would rather remain trapped in his tower—his bid for the power of the Ring failed, and now he is nearly defenseless against Sauron. Saruman's fear suggests that when a selfish quest for power fails, it leaves one vulnerable to those more dominant. Treebeard has reclaimed the lands of Isengard for the natural world. He will remain and keep watch over them and Saruman to ensure the land heals as much as possible.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 11

At dusk, Gandalf and his companions leave Isengard for Helm's Deep, and they notice that the ents have toppled the white hand, the sign of Saruman, from its pillar and broken it into pieces. Merry, riding with Gandalf, bothers him with questions about their destination and travels until Gandalf tells him to find someone else to teach him about Rohan—Gandalf is too preoccupied with other thoughts. Merry agrees to ask Aragorn but wonders why they're planning to split the party up to ride in secret. Gandalf explains that though they've won the first battles, they're still in danger. Sauron will be watching Isengard and Rohan carefully, and he still doesn't know how Saruman communicated with Sauron.

When they stop to make camp, the hobbits lie together, and Pippin is strangely restless. He asks Merry if he got any interesting information out of Gandalf, but Merry replies that Pippin heard most of it since he was close by. The hobbits agree that Pippin can ride with Gandalf tomorrow and that he hasn't changed much since his reappearance, though he seems somehow to have grown to be more than he was. Pippin is curious about the glass ball and why Gandalf was so quick to take it from him. He wants to look at it. Merry reminds Pippin of the phrase Sam used to quote—"Do not meddle in the affairs of Wizards, for they are subtle and quick to anger"—and tells him to go to sleep.

Pippin lies awake thinking about the glass ball until he can't stand it any longer and gets up, wrapping himself in his cloak. He finds Gandalf sleeping with the ball wrapped in cloth next to him and replaces it with a stone. Pippin calls himself a fool and suddenly wants to put the ball back, but fears he'll wake Gandalf up if he tries. Instead, he takes it away to a hill and sits staring at it until it begins to glow. Pippin is unable to look away as the lights spin and then go out. His body is rigid, trapped leaning closer and closer to the ball. Eventually, he is able to scream and wrench himself away, falling onto his back.

Gandalf, looking haggard, finds Pippin there and throws his cloak over the ball. Pippin is still rigid, staring unseeingly up, and Gandalf lays a hand on his head. Pippin sits up, shuddering and confused, and shouts, "It is not for you, Saruman!" When Gandalf calls out to him to wake him up completely, Pippin immediately asks Gandalf for forgiveness. He saw visions in the ball of a dark sky with nine winged creatures and then Sauron spoke to him, thinking at first that he was Saruman. When Pippin revealed to Sauron that he was a hobbit, Sauron laughed and hurt him, then gave him a message for Saruman that the "dainty" was not for him.

With the toppling of the white hand, the ents have declared that Isengard no longer belongs to Saruman. Orthanc may be his prison, but the land is no longer his to abuse. Though they've won an impressive battle against Saruman, Gandalf is still troubled by Saruman's corruption and the danger this foreshadows. Merry's conversation with Gandalf serves to remind the reader of two facts that will remain important: Saruman possessed some way of speaking to Sauron, and Merry and Pippin are particularly curious hobbits.



Like Merry, Pippin wants to hear news of their plan from Gandalf. Both hobbits are naturally curious, but Pippin is unusually intrigued by Saruman's crystal ball, which he briefly held outside of Orthanc. Merry isn't very interested in it, and his quoting Sam suggests that Pippin should mind his own business.



Pippin's curiosity about the ball doesn't just bother him, it tempts him, as Boromir was tempted by the Ring. Pippin's desire to see the ball again exceeds his natural curiosity, indicating that there is some magic at work, and probably sinister magic, since Pippin knows that stealing it from Gandalf is wrong. Once he has it, Pippin is clearly entranced by some evil force.



The scene with Pippin and the ball is frightening and confusing. Just as Pippin doesn't know what the ball is or what's happening to him, neither does the reader, and both must wait for Gandalf's help. Pippin is deeply shaken by his experience speaking to Sauron through the ball and appears more afraid now than he ever has in physical peril. Sauron, as Pippin describes him, is arrogant, mocking, and cruel. Though neither Pippin nor Sauron specify what the "dainty" is, the reader can infer it means either the Ring or the hobbit carrying it (Frodo).



Gandalf forces Pippin, who is frightened but unharmed, to look into his eyes and hold his gaze. Gandalf smiles slightly, then comforts Pippin with a hand on his head. Sauron didn't speak to him long and wasn't able to get vital information from him, though only because of Pippin's good luck. Sauron didn't want information from Pippin as much as he wanted to bring Pippin back to the Dark Tower to deal with him slowly. Gandalf forgives him for his theft, urges him to say something if he feels drawn to the ball again, and carries him back to bed to sleep with Merry.

When Gandalf returns to the others, they discuss how close to disaster they came that night. Aragorn asks how Pippin is, and Gandalf explains that hobbits have "an amazing power of recovery" and that the horror of Pippin's experience will probably fade too quickly for it to really teach him a lesson. The ball is a *palantír*, a communication device, and Gandalf gives it to Aragorn for safekeeping, though he cautions him not to use it yet. Aragorn reminds Gandalf that he's never been a hasty person and Gandalf advises him not to "stumble at the end of the road" and to ensure Pippin doesn't know where the *palantír* is kept.

Pippin may actually have saved Gandalf from a terrible mistake—if Gandalf had the chance to investigate the ball, he might have accidentally revealed himself to Sauron. Gandalf decides to split the party up immediately. He'll ride ahead with Pippin, while Théoden takes Éomer and some of the riders, and the rest go with Aragorn. Suddenly, a shadow falls on them as a Nazgûl passes in front of the moon. Gandalf shouts for everyone to ride away quickly. They break apart as they planned and flee. Merry jokes to Aragorn about Pippin's good luck—he gets to ride with Gandalf like he wanted.

Pippin, warm on Shadowfax and safe with Gandalf, begins to feel better. He marvels at Shadowfax's speed, and Gandalf explains that the *palantír* were made by Fëanor, an ancient elf, and eventually possessed by Gondor and used to unite the country. Most of them are lost now. Gandalf guesses that the *palantír* was a contributing factor in Saruman's corruption, since even he himself feels the draw to look into it.

Though Pippin made a nearly catastrophic blunder in accidentally contacting Sauron, the quest isn't endangered, partially because of Sauron's own arrogance and cruelty. He wastes his opportunity to interrogate Pippin because he believes he can retrieve him from Orthanc to torture in person in Mordor. Gandalf reassures and forgives Pippin, despite the seriousness of his transgression—which he knew was wrong and which could easily have led Sauron to the Ring—and the matter is quickly closed. Gandalf's mercy and matter-of-fact attitude contrast with Sauron's relish for brute power and control.



Hobbits, Gandalf has learned from his long history with them, are so resilient and have such capacity for joy and optimism that he believes Pippin will recover as quickly from this ordeal as he does from any traumatic event. The palantír can tempt those who touch it—a power similar to the Ring's, though less potent. Gandalf believes Aragorn can withstand the temptation and advises that they keep it away from Pippin to avoid tempting him further. Though Gandalf trusts both Aragorn and Pippin, he also understands that even the best people are fallible and susceptible to corruption, and so he gives Aragorn his warnings anyway.



Pippin's theft has become a very fortunate accident. It wouldn't necessarily be catastrophic for Sauron to know Gandalf still lives, but Sauron's ignorance of the fact gives them a slight advantage. Still, there are consequences to Pippin's actions, and they're swift. Sauron has sent his Nazgûl, and once he realizes the hobbit isn't in Orthanc, he'll send the fearsome creatures to search the surrounding countryside. The party that rode to Isengard has to split up and leave the area as quickly and stealthily as possible. Despite the disastrous night and his separation from Pippin, Merry still finds the energy to comfort himself with a little joke about Pippin getting his wish.



The palantíri, like so many other things in Middle-earth, have fallen from a just and noble use (protecting and uniting Gondor) to a nefarious purpose. So too has Saruman, in turn, been corrupted through the palantír. Gandalf's readiness to forgive Pippin for the theft now becomes clearer; if Saruman was corrupted by the palantír, and Gandalf also feels a compulsion towards it, it would be unreasonable of him to expect a young hobbit to resist.



Gandalf chides Pippin for stealing the *palantír* but admits that Pippin's presence has probably confused Sauron into thinking that Saruman is withholding a captive hobbit. Gandalf isn't certain if, in the long run, it will help them or reveal the involvement of Gandalf and Aragorn to Sauron. As a result, they have to flee. Gandalf is taking them far away, to Minas Tirith, and advises Pippin to stop asking questions and sleep while he can. As Shadowfax runs, Pippin, falling asleep, feels as though he and Gandalf are sitting still while the land rolls away beneath them.

For now, Sauron's hastiness in letting Pippin go has only caused him confusion. His arrogance and belief in his own power have twice been proven weaknesses, not strengths as they first appear. He still has no idea the Fellowship seeks to destroy the Ring and now lost his only clue to finding it. While Sauron's incredible power makes him a dangerous enemy, it also causes him to make critical mistakes. Whether Pippin's theft of the palantír will ultimately help or hurt them is not yet clear. Still, Pippin seems largely unharmed by his ordeal, and greatly comforted by Gandalf's closeness. His friends are split apart again, as they were at the end of [The Fellowship of the Ring](#), but, like then, they each have a commitment to duty and their own part to play in the defense of Middle-earth.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 1

Sam and Frodo spend the three days since they parted with the Fellowship climbing the slopes of the mountain Eryn Muil, frequently lost and retracing their steps, but heading steadily east. Sam says they're in "a fix"—they have to go to Mordor, the one place no one wants to go. Frodo believes it's his fate to go to Mordor, so he must eventually find a way, but he's tired and lost and doesn't know what to do. It's too late to turn back now because of the orcs patrolling behind them. Sam tells Frodo that the only food they have left is **lembas**, so it seems as though he brought all his cooking gear for nothing.

Sam and Frodo are lost and losing hope—their destination is clear, but the path is obscured. The land near Mordor is desolate, devoid of life and food, and poisoned by mere proximity to Sauron, reflecting his moral corruption. Nothing good can survive near Mordor—possibly including Sam and Frodo. Though they still have their lembas, which sustains them and gives them a brief spiritual respite, its emotional properties don't seem to be quite as effective closer to Mordor.



In the morning, after they've rested, Sam asks Frodo if he's seen Gollum, who's been following them. Frodo hasn't seen him for two nights, and Sam hopes they've finally gotten away from him. Frodo just wants to get out of the hills, but, as the day passes, they can't find a way out. By the end of the day, they find their path stopped by a ravine; they can go west and face further delay or east to the edge of the cliff. They decide to try to climb down the cliff, which is lower than they initially thought.

Here, Sam reveals that Gollum has been following them—or, more accurately, following the Ring—since they parted from the rest of the Fellowship. Sam dislikes and mistrusts Gollum, whom he knows primarily as a villain from Bilbo's stories. Though faced with more drudgery and endless hills, Frodo and Sam stick determinedly to their purpose, searching for the right path.



Sam argues that he should go first, so that if he falls he won't knock Frodo down, but Frodo wants to go first and find the safest path for Sam. Just as Frodo lets himself down to find the first foothold, a dark shape flies overhead with a blast of wind and a cry like they heard while fleeing from Hobbiton, and Frodo slips down the cliff onto a ledge below. Sam calls out to his master and Frodo answers, but he can't see and can't climb up. Sam, muttering to himself, recalls that he packed rope from Lothlórien in his bag and throws an end down to Frodo. Together, they pull him back up. It begins to rain heavily, and Frodo realizes he might have drowned in the crevice he'd fallen into without Sam's rope.

While Frodo's duty is to take the Ring to Mordor and destroy it in Mount Doom, Sam's very simple duty—assigned to him partly by Gandalf, partly by his role as a member of the Fellowship, and perhaps most of all by himself—is to protect and care for Frodo. He takes his duty very seriously and has already proven himself willing to risk his life for Frodo. In this case, Frodo's good sense prevails over Sam's generous nature. Yet when he falls, it's Sam's preparation that saves him.



When the rain stops, they use the rope to get down the cliff, Frodo lowering Sam down first. Once they reach the ground, they realize they have no way to get their rope back, since it's tied to a stump at the top of the cliff, and Sam regretfully tugs on it, as if to say goodbye. To their surprise, it comes loose from the stump and falls down the cliff. Frodo laughs at what he thinks must be Sam's poorly tied knot, grateful that it held his weight, but Sam thinks the rope simply came when it was called.

Sam is very attached to his gear, much of which he brought for cooking, though he has realized there's nothing to cook near Mordor. Still, he clings to reminders of home and of Lothlórien. Carrying the supplies, including the rope, is a labor of love born from the possibility that Frodo might one day need some small comfort that he can provide from his bag. Their conversation about the rope that unties itself reveals that Sam is much more eager than Frodo to believe in the wonderful and inexplicable. His optimism is something else he can offer Frodo, who, weighed down by the Ring, often lacks optimism of his own.



As they continue down Eryn Muil, Sam hopes that they've confused Gollum enough by disappearing down the cliff that he won't be able to find them again. They search for a place to shelter for the night at the foot of the mountain, but only find a boulder to block the wind. As Frodo urges Sam to sleep, he spots Gollum crawling down the cliff. The hobbits don't think Gollum can see them, but Frodo guesses that he can smell them. Sam, sick of Gollum following, gets up to "have a word with him," and they creep close enough to the cliff to hear him.

Though Sam is disturbed by Gollum, bringing him up often in conversation and deciding to confront him, Frodo doesn't express discomfort about Gollum following them, instead seeming to accept it as a fact of their journey. Sam is attentive to any possible threat to Frodo, and, at the moment, Gollum is the most pressing danger.



Gollum mutters to himself that he hates the hobbits and is looking for his "Precious" **Ring**. Reaching a place on the cliff with no footholds, Gollum falls a dozen feet to the ground, and Sam quickly jumps on him. Before Sam can pin him down, however, Gollum wraps his limbs around Sam, trapping him and biting his shoulder. When Frodo threatens to cut Gollum's throat with Sting, Gollum lets Sam go and begs pitifully for mercy, coughing and whimpering.

Frodo understands that it is natural for Gollum to follow the Ring, his only love and obsession. Sam is less willing to accept Gollum as their perpetual shadow, but, despite his best attempt, can't physically overpower Gollum. It's Frodo, the bearer of the Ring—and therefore the master of Gollum—whose threats are effective.



Sam suggests they tie Gollum up, but that would mean leaving him to die. Frodo remembers the conversation he once had with Gandalf, who advised him not to be eager to kill even those who might deserve it. Realizing that he does pity Gollum after all, Frodo can't bring himself to kill the "poor wretch." However, Frodo won't let Gollum go, either. He decides to bring Gollum with them and make him help them if he can. Gollum agrees to guide them to Mordor, and Frodo addresses him as Sméagol, his old name. When Gollum insists that Sméagol is gone, Frodo suggests that they might find him again.

Though Frodo once said that Gollum deserved death, he can't bring himself now to kill him. Now that he understands the burden of the Ring and sees how pitiful Gollum actually is, Frodo is moved to mercy. Though Frodo is afraid of Gollum and has the power to kill him, he takes Gandalf's advice and decides to use that power to defend him instead. The use of power for mercy and kindness rather than oppression is the sort of power valued by the Fellowship and their allies—and it's the sort of power Sauron can't understand.



The hobbits rest, but only pretend to sleep, on guard for what Gollum might do. Gollum attempts to bolt as soon as he thinks they're asleep, but Sam grabs him before he gets far, and they tie Sam's rope to his ankle. Gollum begins to scream, claiming that the elvish rope hurts him, though the knot is not tight. Frodo forces Gollum to swear by the **Ring** to be good and serve Frodo. It seems to Sam as though Frodo has grown into a tall, stern lord.

It's clear to Sam and Frodo that Gollum is treacherous; his allegiance is to the Ring, not to Frodo. Eventually, he'll try to reclaim it. Still, since the Ring has power over Gollum, so does Frodo—at least for now. Often, in the Lord of the Rings series, when characters reveal their inner power, it is visible to others as stature and height. Now Frodo joins the ranks of Aragorn and Gandalf: physically unassuming yet powerful figures who wield their power wisely.



They remove the rope after Gollum swears, and a change comes over him. He speaks directly to the hobbits rather than to "his precious self" and acts friendly and eager to please, "cackling" when Frodo speaks kindly to him and weeping when he's chastised. It makes Sam suspicious, and he tries not to speak to Gollum much. Gollum says that he knows a path towards Mordor called the Marshes that the orcs don't use, and he leads the way towards it in the silent dark.

Gollum has two names and two personalities. This kinder one that he now shows to Frodo correlates more to the person—Sméagol—that he used to be before the Ring corrupted him. Gollum's opposed and warring personalities reflect the much larger conflict between good and evil raging on a worldwide scale. The fawning act Gollum puts on makes Sam suspicious, resentful, and even more determined to defend Frodo from any threat.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 2

As Gollum leads Sam and Frodo to a narrow gully that heads towards the marshes, he sings a song about the harshness of the land and the riddles he once told Bilbo. Sam, meanwhile, worries about the problem of food, now that Frodo has adopted Gollum as their guide. He wonders how Gollum has been feeding himself, and guesses, from the sight of him, that he hasn't been feeding himself well. Sam imagines that Gollum might try to eat one of them if food gets scarce and resolves not to let his guard down.

Though Frodo carries the burden of the Ring and has now taken on the responsibility of Gollum as well, it's Sam who has to consider the practical aspects of traveling through a barren land. Gollum becomes an extra burden for Sam, who has to worry about him hurting Frodo and eating their dwindling supply of food.



Near sunrise, Gollum leads them to a hiding place in the gully to hide from orcs during the daylight and eat something. Gollum doesn't like the taste of the **lembas**, which smells like the elves and chokes him when he tries a bite, and complains that he'll starve. Sam thinks it tastes better now that he knows Gollum hates it. Sam intends to keep watch while Frodo sleeps, though Frodo doesn't think it's necessary. But Sam accidentally falls asleep until dusk.

Just as he hates elven rope, Gollum hates elven bread. He can no longer eat cooked or processed foods, preferring raw meat and fish instead. This suggests that he's cut himself off from the good things of ordinary life. His hatred of the lembas also implies his rejection of its properties of physical restoration and spiritual renewal. Sam pays more attention to the taste and its effects, pleased that the lembas separates himself and Frodo—still able to recognize and enjoy good things—from Gollum.



When they wake, Gollum is gone, and Sam feels a little bad for assuming Gollum would try to hurt them at the first opportunity. Gollum reappears to tell Sam that he's going to find food, waking Frodo up. Frodo tells Sam not to feel bad for falling asleep on watch and assures him that Gollum will come back—he won't leave the **Ring** any time soon.

The hobbits don't know how long their task will take them, but it seems likely that they won't have enough food to return after they reach Mordor. They only have enough **lembas** to last about three weeks. Frodo, calling Sam his "dearest hobbit," admits that he doesn't think they'll survive to need food after reaching Mount Doom and completing their quest. Just getting there already feels like too much for him. Sam takes Frodo's hand and cries over it.

Gollum, covered in mud and chewing on something, returns to lead them on down the gully, which shallows out as they go. On their third night with Gollum, they reach a stretch of marshes with the mountains of Mordor looming in the distance, and set out across them in the dim morning, since the only other way to the mountain is watched carefully by Sauron. They walk in single file, following Gollum through the maze of pools, and Frodo lags behind often in his exhaustion. The walk is slow and wearisome, with Gollum stopping them frequently to test the stability of the ground.

In the dark, the hobbits keep close to Gollum, and Sam begins to see wisps of light over the marshes. Finally, after the lights have surrounded them, he asks Gollum what they are. Gollum calls them "candles of corpses" and warns Sam not to look at them or follow them. Realizing Frodo has lagged behind again, Sam goes to fetch him and finds him standing stiffly, staring at the lights, his hands covered in water and slime. Frodo seems as though he's returned from a dream when Sam urges him away from the lights, but on their way back to Gollum, Sam trips and plunges his hands into the water. He falls back away from the water, crying that there are "dead things, dead faces" in the water. When Sam asks who the faces are, Frodo answers that he doesn't know, but he's seen them—Men, Elves, and Orcs, all dead and rotten.

When Gollum doesn't take the first opportunity to kill them and steal the ring, Sam—suspicious of any threat to Frodo, yet usually kind—begins to feel remorseful that he was so harsh with Gollum. He seems to have the most pity for Gollum when he's not actually there; as soon as Sam has to deal with Gollum firsthand, the feeling fades.



The narrator conveys Frodo's inner turmoil primarily through Sam's observations of Frodo and their conversations. Rather than hoping for the best, Frodo doubts his abilities and prepares for the worst. Hope, as proven already by the Three Hunters and the battle of Helm's Deep, is a powerful motivator—one that Frodo has lost somewhere along the road to Mordor.



Frodo's physical exhaustion is tied to his internal struggle. While traveling, he must also contend with the Ring's influence and his own despair about what he thinks is his imminent death. Much of this internal struggle is invisible, noticeable only when he mentions it to Sam and when it's expressed through his listlessness and trouble keeping up with his companions.



Like the Ring and the palantiri, the lights above the marshes seek to steer them away from their path and tempt them towards some evil end. Frodo, lethargic and hopeless, seems almost to fit in with the corpses in the water. He isn't startled by them as Sam is, but reaches his hands towards them, emphasizing both his vulnerability to seductive influence—since he's also fighting off the corrupting power of the Ring—and his growing weariness. Sam, as ever, is his guide away from danger, but even Sam can only do so much to save him from the internal strife that's turning him slowly corpse-like.



Gollum explains that there was once a great battle on the Dead Marshes. Sam argues that the battle was an age ago, so the bodies can't actually still be there. Gollum doesn't know how to explain it, and adds that he once tried to swim down to the corpses and couldn't actually touch them. Sam glares at him, guessing that Gollum wanted to eat the bodies. They walk on, trying to ignore the lights, sometimes crawling as Gollum does to get through difficult patches of mud. Sam thinks they'll turn into three "little Gollums in a row" if they spend much longer in the marshes.

Late that night, they come to the end of the marshes and reach solid ground. Gollum urges them to press on to keep Frodo away from the lights, and smells something in the air that makes him uneasy. All three of them hear a high-pitched cry from far away and the lights on the marshes go out. By the light of the moon, they see a black winged shape emerge from Mordor, passing low over them and then returning to Mordor. Gollum lies cowering, crying that the wraiths see everything. He refuses to move again until the moon goes down.

Sam notices another change in Gollum—he's still fawning, but he returns to his old speech patterns and looks strangely at Frodo. Frodo, meanwhile, is worryingly weary, hardly speaking, and walking as though the burden of the **Ring** grows heavier the closer they get to Mordor. He is also troubled by the Eye, the sense of a hostile presence that seeks to find him and pin him down. Gollum probably feels some similar weight, a combination of the heaviness of the Eye, his desire for the Ring, and his promise to Frodo.

Sam is so concerned for Frodo that he hardly feels the darkness of Mordor weighing on him. He devotes himself to watching over Frodo and encouraging him "with clumsy words."

In the daytime, they hide under the cover of rocks, and for the next two nights they press on towards the mountains through the stinking air. On their fifth morning with Gollum, they reach the hills at the foot of the mountains of Mordor, where nothing lives or grows. Frodo finds the land more awful even than the Dead Marshes.

The Dead Marshes are a wound left on Middle-earth from the conflicts of the people who inhabited it. Though the battle was many generations ago, the Dead Marshes haven't healed. The candles still lure people down and the bodies are still in the water. The fact that Gollum can't actually touch the bodies implies that the harm and pollution done to Middle-earth is spiritual as well as physical. Though the allied Free Peoples seek to stop the decline of Middle-earth, and some wish to restore it, the Dead Marshes indicate that such a feat may not always be possible.



Travel through the lands surrounding Mordor means the constant threat of surveillance by the enemy. Gollum and the hobbits avoid all light, making them more difficult to spot, but also robbing them of the fortifying power of daylight. Gollum's fear and hatred of the sun and moon are similar to his hatred of the lembas; things that bring others joy and peace of mind are repellent to him.



Frodo is weighed down both by the Ring and the very land they pass through. Sauron's search for them, even while unsuccessful, is a mental strain on Frodo. Frodo's environment, corrupted by Sauron, seeks to wear him down in a way that makes him more susceptible to the influence of the Ring and thus more vulnerable to capture. Gollum feels similar internal turmoil, but his is more obvious, expressed through his speech and mannerisms.



Sam's love for Frodo and his dedication to his duty consume him so entirely that he fails to notice the oppressive force surrounding him. His devotion provides him with the emotional resilience to remain optimistic and share that hope with Frodo.



As they grow closer to Mordor, the land, previously polluted and corrupted, becomes dead. They've entered a completely barren land that supports no life at all, a visual reminder to Frodo that he, too, will likely die there, at the hands of the same corrupting power.



They try to rest for the day, the hobbits taking turns watching and sleeping. Sam wakes up to find Frodo asleep and Gollum having a conversation with himself, arguing in two voices. One side of him, called Sméagol, wants to be loyal to Frodo, and the other side, called Gollum, wants to take the **Ring**. Gollum argues that they promised Frodo not to let Sauron have the Ring, but Frodo is carrying the Ring towards Sauron.

Sméagol's primary argument against Gollum is that he promised to be good to Frodo, who is kind to him. Gollum tries to console Sméagol, saying that they can still be good, both to Frodo and themselves. One moment, Gollum assures Sméagol that they don't have to hurt Frodo if they don't want to, and the next, he insists that they have to hate all Bagginses and anyone who holds the **Ring**. Gollum tries to cajole Sméagol into taking the Ring and keeping it safe from both Frodo and Sauron. With the power of the Ring, they can protect themselves, or become "Gollum the Great" and eat fish every day.

Sméagol whines that there are two hobbits, so if he tries to take the **Ring**, they'll overpower him. Gollum, like a child, repeatedly insists that he wants the Ring, no matter the obstacles or consequences. When Gollum then wonders aloud if an unnamed "She" might help him, Sméagol vehemently protests. Gollum shouts again that he wants the Ring, and each time he speaks, he reaches his fingers towards Frodo's neck.

Sam, secretly watching, realizes that Gollum's desire isn't as simple as ordinary hunger. He doesn't want to eat them, as Sam had assumed. Instead, he feels the pull of the **Ring**. Sam wonders who the "She" Gollum mentioned is. Something tells Sam that he shouldn't let Gollum know that he heard his plans, so he sits up and yawns, asking for the time as though just waking up. Gollum is tense for a moment, hissing, then falls back into his fawning act and says that it's time to go. Sam curses him silently and wonders if Gollum isn't just as dangerous traveling with them as he would be let loose in Mordor.

Frodo wakes up refreshed by pleasant dreams, and Gollum greets him with "doglike delight." Frodo promises that if Gollum takes them to the Black Gate, Frodo will let him go free. Gollum promises to get them there but doesn't seem to think that's where he'll part with Frodo. Through the night, as they travel, the winged shapes fly out of Mordor three times, sensing the **Ring**. Gollum pleads with the hobbits not to continue towards the gate and refuses to move until Frodo threatens him with Sting again.

The world of Middle-earth is split in a conflict between the forces of good and evil that rages both on battlefields and in individuals. Gollum's internal battle manifests as an audible argument between his two opposing personalities, which have fundamentally conflicting ideas about morality, power, and desire.



Sméagol, childlike and trusting, has a number of reasons to remain loyal to Frodo. He wants the Ring desperately, but he doesn't want to break his promise to Frodo to take it. Gollum, the representative of the Ring's corruption, twists those arguments however he can to achieve his goal. Gollum's arguments are disjointed, reflecting the breakdown he's suffered from long years of inner conflict—he threatens and bribes Sméagol in turns.



Sméagol's principles begin to break down under pressure; he no longer argues that taking the Ring is wrong, only that it's difficult. Gollum is a being of pure desire. Impatient with Sméagol and running out of bribes, he resorts to a tantrum about his "wants." Though Gollum doesn't explain who "She" is, Sméagol's response—and the fact that "She" would help Gollum take the Ring—indicates her fearsomeness and danger. Sméagol, it seems, really doesn't want Frodo harmed.



The hobbits' journey towards Mordor reveals the deep connection between the mind and the body. While dealing with internal conflict, Gollum actually alters his voice and mannerisms. Sam, relatively unfamiliar with the mental temptation of the Ring, mistakes Gollum's desire for a physical feeling—mere hunger. As they travel, weariness contributes to depression, and depression contributes to weariness. The lands around Mordor place strain on the whole person, body and mind—another reason why Sam recognizes Gollum's cheerful fawning act as so obviously false.



While Gollum allows Frodo to carry the Ring for now, he'll do anything to keep Sauron from getting it. Ominously, his hesitation about continuing towards the gate and his insistence that his journey won't end there implies that he has some plan for preventing Frodo from actually crossing into Mordor with the Ring.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 3

Flanking the path through the mountains into the land of Mordor are two watch-towers, once built by Gondor but long abandoned and now manned by Sauron's forces. Across the path, Sauron built a stone wall with a single iron gate, constantly guarded by orcs. Sam and Frodo watch the patrols despairingly and Sam remarks that his father always said he'd come to a bad end if he didn't watch out. It's clear to Sam that they can't get through the gate—they'll have to find another way.

Gollum says he knew that they couldn't get in through the gate but brought them there because Frodo told him to. Frodo resolves to somehow get through the gate, but Gollum tells him that doing that would just be delivering the **Ring** to Sauron and asks Frodo to give it back to him instead. Gollum tries again to dissuade them from entering the Black Gate, insisting that there is another secret way to enter Mordor. Though Gollum seems genuinely worried for Frodo's safety, Sam is suspicious, guessing that his two halves—Sméagol and Gollum—are united in wanting to keep Frodo away from Sauron. One wants to protect Frodo and the other to find other opportunities to take the Ring. Sam thinks it's a good thing that Gollum doesn't know that Frodo intends to destroy the Ring.

Frodo sits for a long time, thinking about what to do. While watching the Black Gate, he sees armies on the march towards Mordor. Remembering his vision from Amon Hen, Frodo realizes now that his hope for a great attack on Mordor by Gondor and its allies was in vain. These armies aren't attacking Mordor, they were summoned by Sauron to aid his forces. Suddenly aware of how dangerous the Gate is, Frodo agrees to hear about Gollum's alternative path into Mordor. He says that Gollum has served him well the two previous times they've been in his power, and now Frodo offers him a third time to prove his loyalty.

However, Frodo warns Gollum not to let his desire for the **Ring** get him in trouble. As a last resort, Frodo will put on the Ring and command him. Though Sam approves of Frodo's warning, he is surprised at Frodo's power and sternness. Sam believes that Frodo is unendingly kind (and consequently a little foolish). Gollum has similarly confused Frodo's kindness with blindness.

What used to be towers that guarded against the return of Sauron have been taken over by Sauron himself. Gondor's slow decline from vigilance to indolence in the face of evil has permitted Sauron's corruption of the eastern part of the country. Once again, Sam's intuition is both quick and accurate. Within minutes of arriving at the Black Gate, he assesses the situation, determines that there's no way through, and realizes they'll have to take another path—a conclusion that takes Frodo quite some time to reach.



By asking Frodo to give him the Ring rather than take it to Sauron, Gollum reveals his true intentions. Though he'll do as he promised and take Frodo to the Black Gate, he'll also do everything in his power to prevent the Ring from falling into Sauron's hands, which means preventing Frodo from being captured by the guards. Frodo, devoted to his task, intends to risk the gate anyway until Gollum reveals the existence of another path into Mordor. Gollum, like Sauron and Saruman, struggles to understand that someone might not want to wield the ultimate power of the Ring. Though he doesn't know why Frodo needs to go to Mordor, he certainly doesn't guess Frodo's plan to destroy the Ring.



One of Frodo's greatest hopes is dashed before his eyes. A great siege on Mordor would take some of the pressure from his shoulders; if he failed to destroy the Ring, there might still be a chance of defeating Sauron. But the siege of his vision won't come to pass. He realizes that Sauron's armies are stronger than he ever imagined, making his quest to destroy the Ring truly essential to the survival of Middle-earth. The fate of the world is in Frodo's hands, and he must decide whether to trust Gollum with such enormous stakes.



Frodo, though not very conscious of his own power—his kindness and resilience—while exhausted on his journey, hasn't forgotten the power he carries with him in the Ring. Though he chooses to use his power over Gollum to protect him, he could use it to command him, too.



Gollum, terrified by Frodo's threat, begins mumbling and groveling out an explanation of the alternative path that goes up into the mountains past an old fortress, the Moontower, that Frodo identifies as Minas Ithil, built by Isildur. Gollum tells them that Sauron hates the fortress and has conquered it and filled it with dreadful things "worse than Orcs." The path continues up to the top of the mountains and then down again the other side to Gorgoroth. Sam protests that, if the tower is manned, they'll just end up with the same problem they had at the Gate, or worse.

Gollum explains that Sauron won't expect them to pass by the Moontower because he's conquered that whole area—he thinks no one can reach it without fighting their way across the bridges. Gollum has talked to orcs and other people that say that the north near the gates is where Sauron is concentrating his attention. The way past the Moontower isn't completely unguarded, but it's the best option they have. Gollum adds that he knows a hidden path into the mountains: a long narrow staircase, a dark tunnel, and then a cleft.

Sam and Frodo are suspicious of how easy the path sounds. Gollum claims to have discovered it when he escaped from Mordor, and Frodo asks if he really escaped or if he was sent out on an errand, as Aragorn thought. Gollum admits that he was told to look for the **Ring**, but he did escape, and he was searching for the Ring for himself rather than Sauron. Frodo feels certain that Gollum really believes he escaped, even if his escape was permitted by the enemy. Still, he has the sense that there's something Gollum isn't telling them.

After prompting from Frodo, Gollum also admits that the path he's taking them to, Cirith Ungol, might be guarded, since there's really no safe place near Mordor. Gollum advises Frodo to either accept that it's the best option or turn around and go home, then sulks, unwilling to say more. Had Gandalf heard the name Cirith Ungol he would have warned them away from the path, but Gandalf was far away in Isengard. Perhaps Frodo feels Gandalf's presence, like he did on Amon Hen, though he believes that Gandalf is dead.

Frodo sits on the ground, trying and failing to remember if Gandalf ever advised him on how exactly to enter Mordor. He doesn't think Gandalf ever ventured into Mordor since the return of Sauron and wonders how a simple hobbit is supposed to manage it. Frodo thinks it's an "evil fate" that forces him to go where the great and powerful can't, but it's a fate he took on himself. That decision, made in his own home, feels as remote as an ancient legend. He doesn't know which path to take, since both seem to end in danger and death.

Once again, the old lands of Gondor are corrupted by Sauron's evil. Sauron has given Minas Ithil, another of Gondor's watchtowers, which he hates and fears, to the Ringwraiths, the worst and most evil of his servants. Sam correctly identifies the trouble of the choice Frodo must now make about which path to follow: it's unlikely that Sauron will leave any road to Mordor unguarded.



Gollum plans to take advantage of one of Sauron's greatest weaknesses: his arrogance. Because he has such a firm hold over that land, he won't be expecting anyone to travel that way. It is likely that Sauron, still expecting a direct military attack from the kingdoms of men and the Ring, won't have any reason to pay close attention to his own lands.



Though it's almost certain that Sauron allowed Gollum to escape captivity in the hopes that he might find the Ring, it's clear that Gollum has no allegiance to Sauron. Like Saruman, he wants the Ring for himself, and would never willingly give it up. Frodo's intuition that Gollum is hiding something, as well as Gollum's plan to take the hobbits to the unnamed "She," indicate that Gollum's intentions in taking the hobbits to the secret path into Mordor are far from good.



In addition to Frodo's wariness of Gollum, the narrator tells the reader directly that the path Gollum proposes is dangerous. Gandalf and the narrator have knowledge of Mordor and the surrounding lands that the hobbits and the reader lack. Despite the fact that Gandalf would help if he could, Frodo, alone and uninformed, must decide what to do and where to place his trust.



Frodo is already worn down by his many burdens; now he's faced with an impossible decision. He can't go home as Gollum suggests. His duty to his quest compels him to choose between two unknown roads, both equally likely to end in disaster. He doubts his ability to both choose well and complete his quest once he's made his choice. Though Frodo thinks of Gandalf and longs for his advice, he has no one to depend on for his decision but himself.



As the day drags on and Frodo tries to make his decision, Sam spots four of the Black Riders circling above them and then speeding back to Mordor. As Frodo stands, he notices more men entering Mordor nearby. Gollum crawls up to look. Sam asks if there were “oliphants” and recites an old Shire rhyme about them, though he isn’t certain whether they actually exist. Gollum saw none and wants Frodo to leave with him and hide. Frodo, laughing a little at Sam’s rhyme, wishes they had Gandalf and a thousand oliphants to break into Mordor by force. However, since they only have themselves, he decides to follow Gollum to his hidden path.

Despair fuels Frodo’s indecision. The Black Gate is under heavy surveillance, and it’s growing more dangerous for the hobbits to linger. This fact, combined with the moment of levity provided by Sam, breaks Frodo from his doubt and enables him to make his choice. Ultimately, he can wish things were different—that he didn’t have to bear his burden or that Gandalf were there to help him—but the facts remain that he agreed to take on the quest and must see it through with whatever skills he possesses. To keep moving, he has to make a choice, even if it turns out to be the wrong one.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 4

They rest until dark, only drinking a little of their water, and Gollum tells them there is drinkable water ahead in streams running down from the Great River. At night, the only light around comes from the red light at the top of the Towers of the Teeth, which seems to be watching them. They keep to the right of the road until the red eye vanishes behind them, then rest in a barren land as the day passes. Sam finds it difficult to rest—even when Gollum is clearly deep asleep—because of his hunger. He longs for a homecooked meal.

At night, Sauron overpowers the land. The red light of his tower, representing his ever-watching eye, is the only light—there’s no visible moon or elven stars. Sam is hungry, and for more than elven bread. Though the lembas has magical restorative properties, homecooked food would have the ordinary ability to comfort and transport him. Sam longs for solace and familiarity in the bleak lands they travel through.



At dusk they start walking again, quickly, into Ithilien, a wooded land. The road they’re following dwindles away as the wild overtakes it, until the stone disappears except for odd paving stones beneath the moss. At dawn they stop again at a stony ridge looking down at the springtime woods. Ithilien, once called the garden of Gondor, is still lovely and plentiful. The smell of the herbs in the air calms the hobbits and makes Gollum retch. At the ruins of an ancient stone basin, they wash and drink water, then find a hiding place to rest. Sam stumbles upon evidence of Mordor’s influence—an area scorched by fire and full of bones. He doesn’t tell Frodo about the spot, worried that Gollum would go and disturb the bones.

In Ithilien, nature and corruption battle for control. Trees and plants have overtaken the paved road and the stone settlements they pass, and the land is shockingly green after the desolation of the lands closer to the Black Gate. Still, Sauron’s influence makes itself known through the scars left by orcs in the green land. Sam attempts to shield Frodo from Sauron’s influence and give him a brief reprieve by keeping him away from the burned place. Once again, Gollum rejects the wholesome things—even simply the smell of herbs—that bring the hobbits joy and solace.



Now that Sam is away from the despair of the Black Gate, he begins to disagree with Frodo’s inclination to think they won’t return after the completion of their quest. He reconsiders the problem of their food situation, deciding that they should save the **lembas** for when they’re in real need, and asks Gollum if he can find food fit for a hobbit. Gollum replies that he always helps if he’s asked nicely.

In the forest and shielded from Sauron’s oppressive gaze—though he didn’t even recognize the strain he was under—Sam finds it within himself to be optimistic. Whether or not he really thinks he and Frodo will survive the task of destroying the Ring, he resolves to be ready for the return trip if he can. Caring for Frodo is his duty, and Sam likes to be prepared for all eventualities.



While Gollum is gone, Frodo eats some **lembas** and falls asleep in the ferns. Sam remembers how Frodo's face looked when he was asleep in the house of Elrond, as though a light shone out of him. Now Frodo looks the same, though he has new lines, and Sam loves him with or without the light.

While Frodo finds it difficult to feel joy and optimism among the oppressive forces of the Ring and Sauron's eye, joy and love come easily to Sam. Even when Sam struggles to find beauty, he always finds it in Frodo and musters enough hope to share. Similarly, though Frodo's duty to carry the Ring is a burden to him, Sam treats his duty to Frodo as a privilege—he loves Frodo and doesn't doubt that his place is by his side.



Gollum returns with two rabbits and Sam sends him to fetch water as he sets up his cooking tools. Frodo looks too thin, and Sam plans to make him a stew. When Gollum realizes that Sam is making a fire to cook, he protests that cooking ruins the meat. Sam tries to convince him to go off and find herbs and vegetables, but Gollum doesn't know what "taters" are. Sam explains, "po-ta-toes," and offers to make some for Gollum, but Gollum still refuses cooked food and Sam sends him off to sleep.

Finally, Sam gets his wish for a homecooked meal and has the opportunity to use the cooking supplies he carried all the way from home. Sam's cooking is both practical, taking advantage of the available food, and a labor of love for Frodo. Gollum can't stomach what the hobbits eat, just as they couldn't eat his raw meat—all Gollum's tastes seem to have been corrupted by his appetite for the Ring.



Frodo wakes from another gentle dream to find Sam standing over him with stew, not quite like he'd be able to make in the Shire, but close. Frodo chides Sam for not resting and for lighting a fire, but he's hungry and glad for the food. Though Gollum is still gone, Sam warns Frodo not to let his guard down and doze off while Sam is asleep. When he goes to wash his cooking gear, he realizes that the smoke from his fire is visible over the trees. Hearing a whistle, he hurries back to Frodo, afraid his fire attracted trouble. Frodo hushes him—he hears voices.

Sam succeeds in giving Frodo a small taste of home with his food, reminding him of better days and reviving his appetite. However, in his excitement to cook for Frodo, he forgets they're still in enemy lands. Though the food does Frodo good, it still might bring them trouble. In situations like this, Sam occasionally becomes so caught up in doing what's best for his beloved Frodo that he forgets to consider what's best for Frodo's quest.



The hobbits pack up and hide in the ferns. The voices belong to four men, who search the ferns for them. Sam and Frodo jump out, swords drawn, and see that the men are dressed in green and brown. They remind Frodo of Boromir and are surprised to discover that the hobbits aren't orcs. The tallest man introduces himself as Faramir, Captain of Gondor. Frodo and Sam call themselves travelers, but Faramir insists that there are no travelers in Ithilien and asks where the third member of their company is. Frodo doesn't know where Gollum has gone but asks Faramir to spare him if he finds him.

Frodo and Sam assume, as Faramir also assumes, that anyone they meet in Ithilien and the lands around Mordor will be enemies. Though Ithilien used to belong to Gondor, it's been corrupted by the enemy, and Faramir can't believe that simple travelers would be passing through. Frodo's dedication to protect Gollum, gain his trust, and rehabilitate him as much as possible persists even in danger. Gollum has been loyal to them, and Frodo has adopted him as another of his duties.



Frodo introduces himself and Sam and explains that they set out from Rivendell with a number of companions including Boromir of Minas Tirith. The men are astonished to hear the name Boromir but believe Frodo when he references the riddle that sent Boromir to Rivendell. Faramir, who is heading to a battle, leaves two guards to protect the halflings and plans to speak to them more later, if he returns at all. Frodo wishes him well and Faramir calls hobbits “courteous folk.”

The reactions of the men when they hear Boromir’s name implies that they might have some connection with him beyond simply being his countrymen and fellow soldiers. Faramir recognizes the importance of courtesy as an indicator of morality. Though some (such as Saruman) are both courteous and immoral, the civility shared between Faramir and the hobbits suggests that they may share values, as well, and adhere to a code of morals that the declining Middle-earth is slowly losing.



The hobbits sit and Frodo eventually speaks to the two men, soldiers of Gondor named Mablung and Damrod. They explain that they’ve come to ambush the Men of Harad, who have sided with Sauron. Damrod believes that Gondor will soon fall to Sauron, but they refuse to let it happen without a fight. Sam wonders where Gollum is, then dozes off. At noon, he’s woken up by horns blowing and the noise of a fight drawing closer.

Damrod’s words reveal that some of the men of Gondor believe wholeheartedly in their imminent defeat. Still, like Treebeard and Théoden, they are devoted to their duty to defend their nation. Even if the coming war is hopeless, there is honor in trying to make a change in the world. Frodo, also on a hopeless quest that will likely lead to his death, has been motivating himself more with fear and necessity than with a desire for honor. More of the realms of men are siding with Sauron in the coming battle between good and evil. Damrod and Mablung don’t offer a guess as to why, but their discussion suggests it’s because they believe Sauron will win the war—that resistance is hopeless.



Sam stands with the two men to watch his first battle as the Men of Harad flee and Faramir pursues them. A man dies in front of Sam, who doesn’t like the sight. Suddenly, there is a different sound of trumpeting and stomping. Sam is terrified and delighted by the sight of an oliphaunt, which carries a tower and rages away through the thicket. He thinks that no one at home would believe that he saw one, then decides to sleep again. The two guards warn him that Faramir will return soon to take them to a safer place and Sam jokes that they should be quiet when they leave. Mablung laughs and assures Sam that Faramir won’t leave him behind, and the two guards watch over him as he sleeps.

Though Sam is excited to see the battle, he quickly realizes that the reality is ugly and gruesome. Still, the sight of the oliphaunt is like something out of a story, exciting him and distracting him from the brutal realities of the battle. His delight shows that Sam’s hard-won knowledge and grim circumstances haven’t made him cynical. He still loves stories of elves and oliphaunts and is still full of wonder about the world. His capacity for joy is one of his great weapons against the enemy’s despair; with it, he can guard both himself and Frodo.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 5

Sam feels like he’s only slept for a few minutes when Faramir returns in the late afternoon with two or three hundred men. Sam stands off to the side with the men as Faramir and Frodo talk. He realizes that Faramir distrusts Frodo’s story about why he was with the Fellowship and where he’s going now. Faramir wants to know about Isildur’s Bane (the **Ring**) which is referenced in the riddle that sent Boromir to Rivendell, but all Frodo will say is that it doesn’t belong to him and that he’s only its messenger.

Sam and Frodo are in a more dangerous position than they realized. Another indication of the decline of mankind is men’s suspicion, particularly towards other races, but Faramir’s wariness is a product of situations beyond his control. Much like Éomer, Faramir is too preoccupied trying to defend his failing country to be perfectly courteous, though he tries.



Frodo assures Faramir that Boromir would answer his questions, if he were there, and also knows about Frodo's role as part of the Company. Frodo adds that enemies of Sauron shouldn't hinder him on his quest. Faramir asks if Frodo was Boromir's friend, and Frodo hesitates, remembering when Boromir tried to take the **Ring**, and then says that yes, he was Boromir's friend. Faramir then reveals that Boromir is dead, and Frodo, dismayed and grieved, realizes that Faramir was trying to catch him in a lie. Frodo asks how Boromir died, since he was alive the last time he saw him, and Faramir alludes to treachery, as though he suspects Frodo of being involved in Boromir's death.

Growing angry, Sam interrupts the conversation to say that Frodo doesn't deserve such treatment and to tell Faramir that he's "got no sense," helping the enemy by accusing Frodo of treachery. Faramir reprimands Sam for speaking for his master, assures him that he will be fair to Frodo, and tells him to sit quietly, which Sam does, red-faced.

Faramir tells them that Boromir was his brother. Eleven days ago, Faramir dimly heard Boromir blow his horn, and then later saw Boromir's funeral boat float by on the Anduin. It was a dreamlike sight, but Faramir is certain that it was real and that Boromir is dead. Frodo explains that the boat was from Lothlórien, and Faramir wonders why Boromir went there rather than home to Gondor. Neither Faramir nor Frodo understand how Boromir could have ended up in the Anduin, but Boromir's horn was found split in two on the shore beneath the Entwash.

Though Frodo is tired and grieving, he has a task to do, and he begs Faramir to let him go. Faramir would rather take him back to Minas Tirith to speak to Denethor, the Steward of Gondor, but he won't make his decision in a hurry, so he takes the hobbits with him to a safe place instead. As they walk, Faramir admits to Frodo that he didn't want to continue their conversation in front of his men and knows that Frodo wasn't completely honest about Isildur's Bane. Frodo insists that he told Faramir all he could, and Faramir guesses that Isildur's Bane was the reason Frodo and Boromir parted badly because Boromir wanted to take it to Minas Tirith.

Boromir's attempt to steal the Ring was a betrayal of his friendship with Frodo. Still, Frodo recognizes that Boromir's actions were influenced by the Ring's corruption, and one moment of weakness doesn't negate the bond he shared with Frodo as part of the Fellowship. Frodo's sadness over Boromir's death is compounded by Faramir's insinuation that Frodo himself had something to do with it.



Though Sam is unused to standing up to people bigger than him, he leaps to Frodo's defense in all things—against Gollum, against depression, and against Faramir. In the battle between good and evil, Sam knows, inaction only helps the enemy.



As the narrator foretold during Boromir's funeral, Boromir becomes a legend in Gondor and many people claim to have seen his funeral boat as it traveled towards the sea. Some force beyond mortal control has deemed Boromir worthy of an honorable memory and bears the boat, dreamlike, down the Anduin and into legend.



Faramir is extremely shrewd, able to make accurate guesses based on the little information Frodo has given him. Frodo has an important duty to accomplish, but Faramir has a duty to Gondor and can't let Frodo continue until he thoroughly investigates them. Though Sam and Frodo attempt to convince Faramir that they're on the same side, Faramir hasn't yet decided whether he will follow orders (and take the hobbits to Gondor) or act on his own judgement of the situation and let them go.



Faramir is certain that Boromir died well for a good purpose and apologizes to Frodo for his harshness in asking about Isildur's Bane. The stewards of Gondor are not descended from the line of Elendil and can't ever become kings. Faramir recalls Boromir's boyhood displeasure that his father was only a steward and not the king. Still, Frodo remembers that Boromir always treated Aragorn well. Faramir believes it. If Aragorn is really the heir to the throne, Boromir would "greatly reverence him."

When Faramir mentions the Grey Pilgrim, Frodo tells him that Gandalf, too, is dead. Faramir notes that Gandalf came to Gondor to see their collection of ancient lore and was interested in stories of Isildur. From this research, Faramir has guessed that Isildur's Bane is a weapon created by Sauron. He's kept this guess secret and he assures Frodo that he wouldn't try to take Isildur's Bane from him to use even if Gondor were falling.

Faramir doesn't seek that sort of power and doesn't love fighting. He only loves the things he fights to protect. Though he wants Gondor to have peace, he understands the necessity of war against an enemy that wants to destroy them. He doesn't want Gondor to be feared, and he doesn't want Frodo to fear him. He promises that he won't ask any more questions and will help Frodo on his quest if he can. Frodo says nothing, afraid that he and Sam are all that's left of the Company and wary that Faramir, like his brother, will be possessed by desire for the **Ring**. Still, Frodo likes Faramir and longs to ask him for help and advice.

Sam listens to the conversation but doesn't participate, glad that they weren't discussing Gollum and hopeful that they might leave him behind. Feeling as though he's being watched, he catches a glimpse of Gollum but doesn't say anything about it. Faramir asks Frodo's permission to blindfold him for the last part of the journey, and Frodo agrees. Mablung and Damrod lead the hobbits so they don't stumble. When Faramir removes their blindfolds, they stand in a fortified cave in front of a glittering waterfall that Faramir calls the Window of the Sunset.

Boromir did die for a noble purpose, but he also nearly fell prey to evil shortly before by trying to steal the Ring. Faramir reveals that, though Boromir has always been interested in power, his respect for Gondor's traditions is greater than his ambition. In his attempted theft of the Ring, Boromir's ambition and his desire to preserve Gondor were unfortunately combined, with nearly disastrous results.



Faramir's assurances reveal him to be very different from his brother. Boromir was tempted to use the Ring to save Gondor and, in [The Fellowship of the Ring](#), actively campaigned for its use in battle at the Council of Elrond. Faramir believes the precise opposite: even if Gondor were falling, he would never wield the power of the enemy, which he knows only dominates and corrupts.



Faramir is the model of a heroic soldier in The Two Towers. He openly expresses that he doesn't fight for glory or fame, but instead because he is called to protect the people of Middle-earth. His words and actions reflect his selfless desire to be a force for good in the world. Though Frodo wants to believe him, his experiences with Boromir taught him to be wary even of allies.



Though Frodo has accepted Gollum as a companion, Sam still mistrusts him and longs to be free of him. Faramir, who now appears to trust Frodo's claims, continues to treat the hobbits with as much courtesy as possible in such troubled times and ensure their safety. Still, Gondor's security is paramount, and he doesn't permit them to learn the location of the secret base.



Faramir invites the hobbits to sleep while their meal is prepared, then goes to speak to his men. The men saw no orcs, but they did see a strange animal—Gollum. Faramir calls it a bad omen, and Sam keeps quiet, unsure if they can trust Faramir. Though he's exhausted, he forces himself to stay awake while Frodo sleeps, even though he wouldn't be able to defend Frodo against Faramir's men. Faramir's men wake Frodo and bring the hobbits water to wash with before they eat. After they eat, Frodo tells Faramir stories about the travels of the Fellowship, careful not to reveal anything important about his quest and instead focusing on Boromir.

Faramir doesn't have much hope for Gondor's survival during the coming war, even if Aragorn joins them with the sword of Elendil. He believes that Gondor has "brought about its own decay" like its founders, the men of Númenor, by falling into complacency rather than remaining wary of the return of the enemy. The Númenoreans sought eternal life and cared more about preserving their past than securing their future.

The stewards of Gondor were wiser. Faramir explains that generations ago, Gondor found allies in the people that would become known as the Rohirrim and that Gondor taught them lore and manners. However, as the Rohirrim have become more like the Númenoreans (the Men of the West), the remaining Númenoreans in Gondor have become more like the Rohirrim (lesser, Middle Men) in their love of war itself. Boromir, for his valor and skill in battle, was considered the best man in Gondor.

Sam asks Faramir for stories about elves, but Faramir doesn't know much elven lore. He adds that another fault of the men of Gondor is that they, like the other men of Middle-earth, have become suspicious of the elves and estranged from them. Faramir is jealous that the hobbits have met Galadriel and Sam gushes that he wishes he could make a song about her.

When Faramir says that her beauty sounds perilous, Sam tells him that people bring "their peril with them into Lórien" and almost says something about Boromir before he cuts himself off. Faramir prompts him to continue about Boromir and the peril he brought with him to Lothlórien. Sam says that, though Boromir was a fine man, Sam knew all along that Boromir wanted "the Enemy's **Ring!**" The hobbits are both horrified that Sam has accidentally blurted the secret of Isildur's Bane, and Sam threatens Faramir not to take advantage of Frodo because of his mistake.

Sam is consistently protective of Frodo's rest and appears to get significantly less sleep than him because of it. He recognizes the importance of basic necessities like food and sleep for maintaining mental and emotional fortitude, both of which Frodo requires to bear the Ring. His insistence on remaining awake, though he can't defend Frodo from Faramir's men, reveals the depth of his devotion to his duty.



Faramir, like many others, lacks hope for the coming war, though he will gladly fight it anyway. Unlike others, however, Faramir believes that the reason Gondor will fall is not primarily Sauron's might, but rather Gondor's own decline from its past greatness. Through its failings, Gondor has allowed Sauron's return, and now the world will suffer.



Faramir represents the founders of Gondor as an elevated and sophisticated society, slowly corrupted by their baser and more warlike neighbors. He feels an affinity with the Númenoreans, who didn't revere warriors or glorify battle for its own sake as Gondor does now.



Faramir has studied the ancient past of Gondor and notices the ways in which mankind has begun to fail the larger world. Like many, Faramir thinks of Galadriel as dangerous, but, unlike most, still longs to meet her, suggesting that he hasn't succumbed to the insular attitude many men have nowadays.



Sam, lulled by the ample food, Frodo's safety, and the topic of elves, lets his guard down and—to their peril—reveals that they have the Ring. As soon as he realizes his error, he leaps to Frodo's defense. The hobbits have learned that even fine men can be tempted to evil by the promise of ultimate power. Faramir may have sworn not to take the Ring, but that doesn't necessarily reflect how he'll act when given the chance.



Faramir stands, musing to himself about how he has the hobbits in his power, and repeats Sam's words about this opportunity to "show his quality." Sam and Frodo run for their swords, but Faramir sits again, finally understanding Boromir's struggle with his desire for Isildur's Bane and realizing that the "trial" was too much for him. Faramir reassures the hobbits that he is not the sort of man to desire power, and, even if he was, he already swore he wouldn't take the **Ring** from Frodo. He comforts Sam about his blunder, claiming that Sam's heart understood that Faramir was trustworthy even if Sam didn't consciously think it.

The hobbits return to their seats and Faramir praises Frodo for taking on such a heavy burden before offering them another chance to rest and asking where the hobbits wish to go. Weary now after his shock and fear, Frodo explains that he's trying to find a way into Mordor to throw the **Ring** into Mount Doom, but he doesn't think he'll actually make it. Faramir is surprised for a moment, then carefully lifts Frodo and carries him to bed. Sam bows to Faramir and tells him that he's proven his quality to be "the very highest." Faramir refuses the praise, claiming that he felt no desire to do anything but help Frodo. Sam accepts that and gives him a compliment instead: Faramir reminds him of Gandalf and wizards.

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 6

Faramir wakes Frodo up before dawn to ask his advice about something, and Sam follows. One of Faramir's men, Anborn, has seen something—not a squirrel or a bird, but an animal with four limbs—on the bank of the basin below them. Faramir's men are waiting for his command to shoot it. Faramir turns to Frodo to ask if they should, and Frodo pauses for a moment before begging him not to. Sam would have said "yes" if he dared to speak.

Faramir asks what the creature is and why it should be spared. In all their time talking, Frodo reveals that he never mentioned his other companion, who evaded capture by Faramir's guards. Gollum has trespassed and, consequently, Faramir should kill him. Frodo answers that Gollum doesn't know the customs of men and that he was only lured into trespassing, following Frodo and the **Ring**, which he carried for many years. When Faramir asks what Gollum is seeking, Frodo answers "fish."

Faramir proves himself to be as just in action as he is in word. As he claimed, he has no desire for the sort of power the Ring offers—dominating and seductive—and doesn't believe it can be wielded to any good end. Finally understanding what Boromir betrayed his ideals for, Faramir pities him. The Ring offered him the chance to be the sole savior of Gondor, and Boromir fell for the trap. Again, Sam's intuition served him well; they've found a new ally in Faramir.



Faramir's actions imply his approval of Frodo's quest. He, like the Fellowship, believes that no one should wield the power of the Ring. Power, according to his beliefs, is meant to be shared and wielded only for the protection of the world. The Ring has no place in that vision. Faramir is the only person besides Tom Bombadil to be completely unaffected by the Ring's seduction—he doesn't overcome his temptation to take it, as Gandalf does, but claims not to have been tempted at all.



Once again, Frodo makes the decision to defend Gollum's life, and again Sam wishes that he wouldn't. Sam's intuition has been proven accurate multiple times; though Sam's wish that Faramir would kill Gollum is counter to Frodo's devotion to mercy, his insistent dislike indicates that Gollum probably is a danger to Frodo.



In many ways, Gollum is a childlike creature, driven primarily by his fears and desires and ignorant of most matters beyond them. In this instance, he truly doesn't intend any harm. Faramir is now faced with another choice between following his duty to the letter (which would mean executing Gollum) and bending the rules for a moral purpose.



As they watch, Gollum swims out of the water and begins chewing on a silver fish. Frodo tells Faramir that because Gollum is “wretched,” “hungry,” and “unaware of his danger,” Gandalf would have forbidden Faramir from killing him. Besides that, Gollum is tied to Frodo’s quest as his guide. Faramir says that he can’t let Gollum go free to later be caught by orcs and reveal their location in Ithilien. He has to either die or be brought inside with them. Frodo asks permission to go down to Gollum, volunteering to be shot himself if Gollum escapes.

Frodo creeps down carefully towards Gollum, who talks to his fish about the **Ring**. As he goes, Frodo is disgusted and wishes he could turn back and tell Faramir to shoot, but Gollum has “a claim on him” as his servant. When Frodo gets close enough, he calls Gollum “Sméagol,” trying to draw him over, and Gollum approaches after a brief delay. Gollum wants them to escape together into the trees, but Frodo asks Gollum to trust him and come up to the top of the waterfall to fetch Sam first.

Frodo fears that, if Faramir ties Gollum up, Frodo’s efforts to bring Gollum inside will look to Gollum like treachery. Still, he doesn’t know how else to save Gollum’s life. Gollum smells something that’s not a hobbit and turns back, enraged, reaching for Frodo and calling him wicked and false. Anborn pins Gollum down and ties him up, and Frodo begs him to be gentle, trying to calm Gollum down as he cries. Gollum spits at him.

Gollum is brought to speak to Faramir and begs to be released, whining that he’s “done nothing.” Faramir asks if he’s really never done anything worthy of punishment and interrogates him. Gollum claims he is lost, with no name and no “Precious”—he’s only hungry. Faramir allows Frodo to cut the ropes and free Gollum. When Gollum swears to never return or lead anyone back, Faramir returns him to Frodo’s care.

Faramir also declares Sam and Frodo free in Gondor as long as they don’t return to the Window of the Sunset without invitation. He adds that they and anyone under their protection will be protected by himself and Gondor. Frodo takes Gollum under his protection, which makes Sam sigh. Faramir tells Gollum that he is safe as long as he stays with Frodo and wishes death on him if he doesn’t serve Frodo well. He asks where Gollum is leading Frodo, and Frodo answers for him, explaining about the Black Gate and the path near Minas Ithil. Faramir knows the name of the pass, Cirith Ungol, and has Anborn take Gollum away and watch him.

Frodo has learned Gandalf’s lesson about mercy well enough to teach it to Faramir; killing Gollum wouldn’t be just adherence to the laws of trespassing, but needless cruelty. Frodo proves his true devotion to his responsibility for Gollum by risking his own life to fetch him, though it’s unlikely that Faramir would ever actually shoot Frodo.



Like Sam, Frodo wishes he didn’t have to travel with Gollum. But he’s made a commitment to Gollum that—like his duty to destroy the Ring—he can’t abandon just because he’d like to or because his path is difficult.



Frodo has worked hard to gain Gollum’s trust, which now appears to be broken as Gollum attempts to attack Frodo. Even so, Frodo is Gollum’s defender, both out of pity and responsibility.



Faramir guesses, as Frodo did in his conversation with Gandalf, that Gollum has done quite a lot worthy of punishment. Still, it’s not Faramir’s place to provide that punishment, even if it’s just. Gollum is under Frodo’s care—if it’s anyone’s place, it’s Frodo’s, and Frodo has declined that power.



Frodo’s decision to show Gollum mercy is proven to be a radical one; both Sam and Faramir seem willing to kill Gollum as a threat to Frodo. Faramir has chosen to follow his conscience rather than the strict rules of the Window of the Sunset and is forced to respect Frodo’s judgement of Gollum, even if he disagrees. Following Frodo’s lead, he uses his power to offer Gollum protection rather than punishment.



Faramir tells Frodo that his intended path is unwise and that Gollum is wicked. He offers to give Gollum safe passage to the border of Gondor if Frodo will leave him behind, but Frodo declines, since he promised to protect Gollum. Faramir thinks it would be better to counsel Frodo to break his word than let him walk into danger. Faramir has heard tales of a “dark terror” that lives in the pass above Minas Morgul, “a place of sleepless malice” which has been taken over by the enemy. Frodo argues that he has no way to get into Mordor besides Cirith Ungol and asks if Faramir would prefer he bring the **Ring** to Gondor to corrupt Minas Tirith.

Faramir doesn't know what Frodo should do, only that he doesn't want Frodo to walk to his death in Cirith Ungol. He doesn't think Gandalf would have wanted it, but Frodo replies that Gandalf is gone. Faramir asks that Frodo at least remember his warnings and be wary of Gollum, who has certainly killed before. Faramir says he doesn't think he'll ever see Frodo again after the hobbits leave but gives Frodo his blessing and urges him to rest more. He promises that they'll tell each other stories together again if Frodo miraculously survives his quest.

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 7

Frodo and Sam rest, then eat again, and Faramir gives them some provisions for the road. His scouts have reported that the land is empty and quiet, so it's a good time for the hobbits to depart. Faramir gives them each a staff made of wood from Gondor and cut down to their size to aid them in climbing. Frodo says that Elrond told him he would find unlooked for friendship on the road to Mordor, and that he has found that friendship with Faramir.

Faramir blindfolds Gollum as they leave but offers to let Sam and Frodo see the way out. Frodo declines, asking Faramir to blindfold all three of them so Gollum will understand that they're not trying to hurt him. In the woods, Faramir counsels Frodo to go straight through the forest before turning east, then embraces both hobbits and kisses their foreheads in the custom of Gondor before walking away.

Faramir's warning is another glaring indication that Gollum is leading Sam and Frodo into danger. He advises Frodo to do the dishonorable thing by breaking his word and abandoning his duty to Gollum rather than follow him to his death. However, Frodo has no other path to take into Mordor. His hope of success lies in Gollum's loyalty to him, a loyalty which both Faramir and Sam strongly doubt. Frodo's answer is firm, and if Faramir protests too vehemently and questions Frodo too much, he risks sounding like Boromir—potentially susceptible to the Ring's corruption.



Without the Fellowship, Frodo is the leader of his own quest. What Gandalf might or might not counsel him to do is no longer important; Frodo can only do what he believes is right, and nothing else. Still, Faramir is a wise counselor, and Frodo's disregard of his advice is concerning, even if there truly is no other way into Mordor.



The supplies Faramir offers are practical, but also a sign of care beyond what courtesy requires of him. Faramir might not have been very useful to Frodo as an advisor, but he has certainly been welcome as a friend. On the barren and listless journey into Mordor, Faramir's hospitality offered cheering respite.



Frodo prioritizes Gollum's comfort by asking to be blindfolded: an attempt to rebuild Gollum's fragile trust. Though Faramir couldn't persuade Frodo to leave Gollum behind, he can at least give the hobbits directions, briefly usurping Gollum's place as their guide, as they set off from the Window of Sunset.



As they travel on, Frodo cautions Gollum not to speak ill of Faramir and his men, who were merciful to him. They stop before nightfall so Frodo can sleep, but Sam is restless, and Gollum wakes them up before dawn. The land is still silent and empty of other living creatures as they near the edge of the woods. Gollum leads them on again towards the east, around brambles and dark pits, climbing steadily up. There seems to be a dark shape rising up in the east and blocking out the stars. The sun never really comes out, leaving them in “dead brown twilight” and in sight of a red light over Mordor. Gollum disappears as the hobbits eat a little and lie down.

Sam has a dream that he’s back at Bag End, wearing a heavy pack in the weedy, muddy garden. He wakes up wanting his pipe, then remembers that he has no leaf to smoke and that they’re very far away from Bag End. Frodo reports that the day is getting steadily darker instead of lighter and that it’s only midday. There’s a throbbing in the air like thunder or drumming, and Gollum still hasn’t returned.

Sam tells Frodo that he can’t stand Gollum, who never did anything useful for them. Frodo reminds him of the Dead Marshes, but Sam still thinks Gollum is up to something. They both hope nothing has happened to him, since they’ll be in trouble if he’s been caught by the enemy. The rumbling noise is louder now, and Frodo fears that they’re in trouble either way, since their journey is almost over. Sam quotes his father—“*where there’s life there’s hope*” “*and need of vittles*”—and offers Frodo some food and a chance to sleep.

As Frodo sleeps restlessly, muttering about Gandalf, Gollum reappears, urging them on. He seems excited or afraid, and Sam is suspicious, asking why they have to leave right then. Gollum will only say that time is running short. He leads them to a patch of tall, ancient trees—what he calls the Cross-roads. They stand in the middle of the ring of trees, the meeting point of the paths to Morannon, the south, Osgiliath, and the pass to Cirith Ungol.

Frodo notices a beam of light from the sunset over Gondor fall on a huge statue that looks like the stone kings of Argonath. Its head is gone, and in its place sits a round stone with a painted face and one red eye. The carved head of the king lies by the roadside, its forehead covered by a trailing plant with small white flowers. Frodo cries out to Sam that “The king has got a crown again,” in reference to the poem that Bilbo wrote about Aragorn which ends “*The crownless again shall be king.*” Frodo takes it as proof that the evil of Mordor, which broke and graffitied the statue, “cannot conquer for ever!” The sunlight disappears and night falls.

The land grows barren and dark again as they leave Ithilien, which was still inside Gondor’s peaceful influence, and draw closer to Sauron’s corruption. Though the stars are out and the sun rises, the atmosphere around Mordor prevents the hobbits from enjoying the light. Mordor is lifeless and joyless, consuming and polluting every part of the natural world.



Despite the oppression of Mordor, Sam can escape to beauty and familiarity in dreams. Even there, though, he is weary and weighed down. Mordor’s ability to suppress the natural world only grows as they travel, emphasizing the corruption of Minas Morgul, which they’re approaching.



Frodo, though determined to see his task through to the end, still has little hope of surviving it, even after his rest with Faramir. Sam lets Frodo focus on his quest, carrying the burdensome Ring until they can destroy it, and instead concerns himself with his duty of caring for Frodo by providing him with hope, food, and rest—fundamental necessities and small comforts.



As Frodo’s choices grow more difficult and his burden grows heavier, he thinks often of Gandalf, who always gave him counsel and comfort. Now he can trust no one but himself to make the necessary decisions. Meanwhile, Gollum’s behavior grows increasingly suspicious. His mention of time running out sounds frighteningly similar to Frodo’s belief that their end is near.



Frodo’s sudden joy proves both the importance of sunlight and the natural world for the wellbeing of hobbits and, above all, the great effect a single moment of joy can have on a weary soul. Frodo isn’t just pleased by the sight of the flower crown, he is enlivened and filled with hope. Though Sauron’s orcs have destroyed the statues, the flowers confirm that Middle-earth itself is on the side of good, reclaiming what was broken and convincing Frodo that evil cannot finally destroy everything righteous and beautiful.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 8

Impatient, Gollum pulls them onwards. Frodo is once again heavy-hearted under the weight of the **Ring** as they pass slowly beneath Minas Morgul, the city of the Ringwraiths. When they arrive at a shining white bridge flanked with grotesque statues, Frodo loses control of himself and runs toward it. Sam catches Frodo at the threshold of the bridge, and he and Gollum pull him away. Fighting a desire to run to the white tower of Minas Morgul, Frodo finally turns around, though the Ring resists him, and he is momentarily blinded. Sam supports him as they retreat to a narrow path leading up the side of the valley away from the main road.

The hobbits, following Gollum, are exhausted. When they can't walk any more, Frodo sits on a stone and wonders to Sam how far he can carry his burden. He says that the **Ring** is "very heavy" and that he needs to rest. Gollum frantically pulls Frodo's sleeve to make him move—the eyes of Minas Morgul can still see them there. At Sam's urging, Frodo rises again, promising to try and walk, but it seems they've already been spotted. A red flash appears in the sky beyond the eastern mountains and an army dressed in black marches from the gate of Minas Morgul, led by the Wraith-king, Lord of the Nine Riders. Frodo's old knife wound throbs and chills him.

The Wraith-king stops suddenly at the bridge, as though sensing something, and looks around the valley. As he watches, Frodo feels the compulsion to put on the **Ring**, though he knows it will only betray him to the Wraith-king. His hand creeps towards the Ring around his neck, but he forces it down and instead holds the **phial** of Galadriel, which he'd almost forgotten about. The Wraith-king rides away, followed by his army, to go to war in the west.

The army is heading towards Osgiliath. Frodo is suddenly afraid that Faramir will be in danger, that his entire quest is too late, and the armies of Mordor will wipe everything out before he can destroy the **Ring**. Overwhelmed, he begins to cry, certain that his quest is meaningless and that no one will know what he did. Then, from far away, he hears Sam's voice, like he would in sunlit mornings in the Shire, tell him to wake up. The gates of Minas Morgul close and Sam urges Frodo to hurry. Frodo is grim but resolute: no matter what, even if no one ever knows about it, he has to complete his task and destroy the Ring.

Though the forces of joy, beauty, and hope are powerful, so is Sauron's corrupting influence, imbued in both the Ring and the land itself. Around Minas Morgul, Frodo is almost overpowered by Sauron's will. When Frodo is unable to trust his mind and bear his burden alone, he depends on Sam to protect him and lead him from danger.



After he is nearly taken over by Minas Morgul and the Ring, Frodo is weighed down by his weariness and the oppressive gaze of the enemy. His burden feels impossible to carry, and he despairs of completing the quest. He's nearing the end of his tolerance, and only Sam can persuade him to keep moving. The blows to Frodo's endurance seem never-ending; as soon as he gathers the strength to stand, he is faced with both the eye of Sauron and the armies of Mordor.



Though Frodo knows the Ring is trying to influence him and get him caught, he still struggles to resist the temptation to put it on and disappear. The phial of elven starlight saves him. A small piece of the natural world to carry with him, the phial provides him with calm and clarity, enabling him to resist the Ring and shielding his mind from the compulsion.



Finally reaching his breaking point, Frodo falls into complete hopelessness, realizing that the world might be destroyed even if he can complete his quest. Then, just as quickly, Sam's voice rescues him from it. Sam holds all the hope and all the memories of home that Frodo can't carry on his own while he is preoccupied with the Ring. Though he takes a selfish moment to mourn that there will be no one to remember him after his quest, he realizes that the quest is inherently worth doing no matter what happens to him.



The hobbits follow Gollum into a narrow opening of rock and series of steep staircases. Sam and Frodo feel safer at first with walls at their sides, but it only makes them more aware of the long fall behind them if they slip. When they reach another level, the red light seems stronger. Frodo notices a black tower set above the pass on the mountain and points it out to Sam. Gollum insists that, though the path is watched, it is probably the least watched of any way into Mordor. They find a crevice to rest in and drink a little water, unsure when they'll find more that's safe to drink. Faramir advised them not to drink from any stream that flows out of Imlad Morgul. Sam says he doesn't like the smell of the pass, and Frodo responds that he doesn't like *anything* about it.

Sam thinks they wouldn't have come if they'd known what it would be like, but he supposes to Frodo that that's how all great stories go. Sam used to think that adventures were exciting and wonderful and that great people wanted to go on them, like a game or a sport. But that isn't the case with stories that really matter—people just end up on the road and choose not to turn back, just like them. Not everyone comes home from an adventure, either.

Sam wonders what sort of story they're in, but Frodo doesn't know. No one knows what kind of story they're in while they're in it. Sam agrees, and references the stories of the Silmarils, noting that Frodo has the light of one of the Silmarils in the **phial** Galadriel gave him. He wonders if they're in the same story. Frodo tells him that great stories never end, and only the people in them come and go. He thinks their part of the story will end soon.

When their story does end, Sam says, he wants real rest and a quiet life of gardening. He thinks important deeds aren't for his "sort," but wonders if they'll ever be put into a book and if people will one day ask to hear the story of Frodo and the **Ring**. Frodo laughs, the first laugh heard in that land since Sauron came to Middle-earth.

Frodo tells Sam that he's left out an important character, Samwise the stouthearted. Frodo "wouldn't have got far" without him. Sam tells him he shouldn't make fun of him, but Frodo is serious. Still, he says, they're in the most frightening part of the book now, and the reader might not want to continue. Sam says he would want to carry on reading. Sam remarks that even Gollum might be a good character, and calls out to talk to him, but Gollum has disappeared.

The lands they travel become even more inhospitable. Still barren, it's now composed of difficult climbs and dangerous heights. Where they're headed, even the water will be polluted. There is a sense of wrongness about the pass that both Sam and Frodo feel. Calmer now, after his renewed resolution to complete the quest, Frodo finds his current physical exhaustion more bearable than the mental strain of his just-escaped ordeal at Minas Morgul.



With Sam's new understanding of stories, he voices the novel's understanding of true heroism: it isn't born from desire for adventure or glory, but rather from accident and need. True heroes are people who devote themselves to a necessary goal despite the difficulty because they believe in its importance—as Frodo has just resolved to do.



With Sam's mention of the world's ancient past, Frodo recognizes that the history of Middle-earth is one long story declining towards their own end. Despite Sam's efforts and preparation, Frodo remains convinced that the effort to destroy the Ring will kill him. Not even the phial, which gives its wielder clarity and hope, can make him think otherwise. In any case, Frodo sees that they must persevere in their story until its end.



Though Frodo doesn't believe in his own survival, Sam still has the ability to remind him of home and lift him briefly out of his depression. Sam continues to believe in the value and power of stories, despite his realization that living in one is much more serious than it sounds. They can teach lessons and, just as importantly, bring people joy. Frodo's laugh suggests that such joy is powerful, even stronger than the barrenness of Mordor.



Sam's stouthearted conviction that he would keep reading even if the story became frightening is exactly what makes him heroic and earns him his place in that story. Frodo truly wouldn't have gotten far without Sam, who keeps him alive by providing for both his practical needs and his spiritual needs.



Sam doesn't like it when Gollum sneaks off, but Frodo doesn't believe he'd betray them now, when he had so many opportunities before. Frodo doesn't think Gollum has any plan besides trying to protect the **Ring** from Sauron for as long as he can or maybe waiting for a chance to steal it from Frodo. Sam knows Gollum won't let them enter Mordor with the Ring and decides to keep a close eye on him. They fall asleep, Frodo's head in Sam's lap and Sam's arm around Frodo to protect him from Gollum "pawing" at him.

Gollum returns to find the hobbits sleeping peacefully and looks suddenly tired, like an old hobbit, turning away before coming back to gently touch Frodo's knee. Frodo cries out in his sleep, waking Sam, who roughly asks Gollum what he's doing sneaking around. Gollum claims he was out looking for paths for them to take, and Sam apologizes, waking Frodo up to keep walking. Frodo protests that it's still dark, but it's always dark there, and they have the last leg of the journey to make.

Frodo asks Gollum if he had a good rest, but Gollum calls himself a sneak, parroting Sam, and says that he had no food and no rest. When Frodo warns Gollum not to call himself names even if they're not true, Gollum says that it was Sam who named him a sneak, and Sam apologizes again. Frodo tells them to let the matter go and asks Gollum if he and Sam can find their way by themselves after today, since Gollum did what he promised and would soon be free to leave them. Gollum protests that they can't find their way alone yet—they still have to reach the tunnel.

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 9

Gollum leads the way towards a looming wall and the hobbits follow side by side. Sam remarks on a foul smell, growing stronger as they approach the entrance to the tunnel. Gollum assures them that the tunnel is the only way to go, but doesn't tell them its name, Torech Ungol, Shelob's Lair. Sam guesses that it's some sort of orc lair, filled with their filth, but Frodo says they must go through anyway. Inside, it's as dark as the mines of Moria, and the air is stale and still. Their senses and their minds grow dull, until they can no longer hear Gollum's breathing ahead of them, and they stumble on through force of will alone.

Frodo still believes he has enough of a hold over Gollum to prevent him from betraying them, though he knows Gollum will protect the Ring at all costs. Sam believes otherwise—that Gollum would do anything to get the Ring back from Frodo—and resolves to protect Frodo from his own naiveté. As Merry and Pippin also turn to the physical comforts of food and rest in their fear and despair, Sam and Frodo find comfort and safety in their physical closeness.



Good and evil still conflict within Gollum, and this is the moment, reaching out to touch Frodo, that he comes the closest to true change. Gollum's suddenly hobbit-like appearance emphasizes the similarities between him and Frodo—only several hundred years of the Ring's influence separates them. If Sam hadn't woken up, or if he'd been kinder when he did, Gollum's better nature might have won his internal battle.



As Treebeard said, names have power. Though Gollum's behavior isn't Sam's fault, his insistence that Gollum is a sneak contributes to Gollum feeling like one. Frodo urges Gollum to see himself beyond the Ring's influence and decide on his own destiny and identity, but the crucial moment has passed, and it appears that Gollum has already decided on his role.



The narrator reveals now that the way Gollum leads them is the lair of something frightening and dangerous but doesn't yet explain what Shelob is. Bad smells, like ugliness and barrenness, often accompany evil. The hobbits can sense that something foul lives inside the tunnel, but they have no choice but to follow Gollum if they hope to reach Mordor and complete the quest.



Sam feels an opening and realizes that there's more than one passage in the tunnel, though the main path continues straight. As the hobbits walk, something like tentacles or plants brushes against their hands and arms, and the smell grows stronger. Frodo reaches an opening in the wall he's touching, and from it comes a smell and a malice so terrible that he stumbles, and Sam falls down. Frodo pulls him up to stagger onwards, hand in hand. They reach a fork in the tunnel and realize that they've lost Gollum. There's no answer when Frodo calls for him, and Sam figures that he's finally left them.

Fumbling in the dark, they discover that the left opening is blocked, and they must take the right. Sam has a feeling that something worse than Gollum is looking at them. As they head down the righthand tunnel, a gurgling noise and a long hiss come from behind them. Sam realizes that they've been led into a trap and reaches for his sword. As he stands in the dark, he sees a light in his mind, and an image of Galadriel standing in Lothlórien with a gift for Frodo. Suddenly animated, Sam reminds Frodo of the **phial**, which Galadriel gave him to be a light in dark places, "when all other lights go out."

Frodo takes out the **phial**, which struggles for a moment in the dark, then brightens to a dazzling light. Frodo shouts a warning in a language he doesn't know, as though another voice is speaking through him, but the thing in the darkness with them has heard the elvish phrase before and isn't afraid of it. Between the hobbits and the opening of the tunnel are two clusters of many-faceted eyes reflecting the light. When Frodo and Sam back away, the eyes keep pace with them. They try to flee, but quickly realize they can't outrun the eyes, and Frodo shouts for them to stand, gathering his courage and invoking Galadriel's name with the phial.

As Frodo advances, drawing Sting and holding the **phial** up, the eyes waver and then disappear. Sam, close by with his sword drawn, marvels that the elves would make a song of their brave stand, then begs Frodo to escape from the tunnel. As they run, the floor rises steeply, and when they reach the end of the tunnel, they find their way blocked by a yielding but impervious surface.

Frodo raises the **phial** and realizes the surface is a densely-woven web, like it was made by a giant spider. Sam hacks furiously at the web with his sword, but it only cuts one cord, which snaps back and lashes his hand. Sam wishes Faramir's curse (death if he doesn't serve Frodo well) on Gollum. Frodo hands the phial to Sam and tries cutting the web himself. Sting has more of an effect, cutting the cords easily until the web is destroyed.

Shelob's lair is sinister, leaving the hobbits lost and sightless. In the dark, the malice of the space becomes almost a physical thing, able to knock them down, similar to the magnetic pull of Sauron's eye. The environment has been so corrupted by Shelob's evil that the very air is full of it.



Sam, aided by his ability to feel joy and conjure memories of home even while surrounded by evil and despair, is the one to remember the phial. Whether his visions are only his imagination or some external power reminding him of the elves, Sam is especially receptive to hope and memory, and that capacity helps him fulfill his duty to Frodo. Galadriel intended the phial to be useful to Frodo in times of darkness; now, following Gollum's disappearance and the loss of their guide, is the perfect time for it to shed light.



The phial provides clarity first, illuminating the space, and then protection and strength as Frodo decides to stand and fight. Frodo's sudden speech in an elvish language implies that the phial channels some external and collective power of the elves through its wielder. As Sam almost conjured Galadriel with his vision, Frodo invokes her name while holding the phial. Despite the power of the voice speaking through Frodo, Shelob is ancient and unafraid.



The combination of Frodo's elvish phial and elvish blade is enough to intimidate Shelob into fleeing. Frodo suddenly seems very much like a hero from a story to Sam—someone who does great feats of daring and magic with ease—rather than the sad and tired friend he's been following towards Mordor.



The only effective weapons against Shelob and her webs appear to be elvish ones; Sting is an ancient sword and has cut through spiderwebs before. With Gollum's betrayal, Sam's intuition is proven right again. Though it won't help them now, he still wishes for revenge.



Frodo runs out of the tunnel, joyful at their escape, and the fading daylight of Mordor looks to him like a hopeful morning. He sees the cleft, Cirith Ungol, ahead of them, and urges Sam on towards it. Sam runs as fast as he can, repeatedly looking back to the tunnel, afraid that the eyes will follow them again.

But Shelob, “an evil thing in spider-form” has many exits from her lair. No one knows how Shelob came to live there, but she was there eating men and elves before Sauron came. Years ago, Gollum found her there and worshipped her, promising to bring her food. She doesn’t care about power, and only wants death for everyone but herself. Now she’s hungry as Sauron’s power grows, and no one passes near her den but orcs.

On the road with Frodo, Gollum often considered bringing the hobbits to Shelob, letting her eat them, then picking through their clothes and bones for the **Ring**. Once he had the Ring, he would take revenge on her. Concealing his plan, he came to see her and bowed, offering her the hobbits as a meal. Sauron knows about Shelob, and it pleases him to know that she lurks there, hungry and enraged, guarding the secret path to Mordor. Sometimes he sends prisoners for her to eat, and he doesn’t mind when she eats some of his orcs. No victim has ever escaped Shelob’s webs.

Sam doesn’t know anything about Shelob except the fact that he’s so afraid that it’s hard to run. There’s dread all around him, there are enemies ahead, and Frodo is running “heedless” towards Mordor. Sam realizes two things: Frodo’s sword is glowing blue, a sign that orcs are near, and the tower in Mordor is glowing red. He hides Galadriel’s **phial** in his pocket and pulls his cloak closer around him. As soon as Sam hides the phial, a monstrous shape appears from a shadow under the cliff, like a huge spider with horns and claws and a swollen body. She quickly moves to attack Frodo, placing herself between him and Sam, who shouts a warning.

As Sam yells to Frodo to look behind him, Gollum clamps a hand over Sam’s mouth and pulls him backwards off his feet, hissing “got him!” and gloating that Shelob will eat him. Desperation gives Sam the strength to fight back and eventually tear himself away from Gollum, hitting him with his staff until it breaks. Gollum realizes his spite led him to underestimate Sam and gloat before he had both hands around Sam’s neck. Now Gollum’s plan is ruined, and he faces “a furious enemy.”

Though Frodo is energized by the phial, Sam remains wary of the monster in the tunnel. Sam’s instinctive fear of another attack is a good indication that their battle isn’t over yet.



The narrator now explains the many-eyed creature in the lair. Shelob is an ancient being of pure malice and insatiable hunger, with no desires but food and destruction. Since she has no interest in power, she has no interest in the Ring—making her one of the only antagonists in series not seeking it either for herself or someone else.



Shelob is the “She” Gollum referred to in his earlier argument with himself. The narrator reveals that the conversation Sam overheard wasn’t the only time Gollum plotted to bring the hobbits to her—over and over, his worse side prevailed over its kinder counterpart. Gollum plans to use Shelob’s strength to take the Ring from Frodo, just as Sauron uses her as a guard for the path into Mordor. Both feed her and take advantage of her powerful hate.



Frodo, usually sensitive to the eye of Sauron, is distracted by their victory and unattuned to the malice around him. It’s Sam who senses danger from all sides and feels its overwhelming weight. He covers the light of Galadriel’s phial to better hide them in the gloom, but the elven light is all that’s preventing Shelob from attacking.



Though Sam was unable to overpower Gollum the first time they fought, the knowledge that Frodo is in danger gives him newfound power. Gollum’s arrogance—the very weakness he noticed in Sauron—aids Sam’s fight as well. In his desire to be cruel and mock Sam before killing him, he allowed Sam the chance to escape. Arrogance, it seems, is a universal weakness of the power-hungry.



When Sam raises his sword again, Gollum flees back towards the tunnel. Sam tries to pursue, forgetting everything but his rage, but Gollum is gone. Suddenly, he remembers the monstrous spider Shelob and runs back, shouting for Frodo. He's too late, and Gollum's plan is succeeding.

Sam's strong emotions, while they're often a great strength, occasionally overcome his logic, to his detriment and Frodo's. By the time he remembers his duty over his anger, the narrator reveals that something has already gone horribly wrong for Frodo.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 10

Shelob looms over Frodo, who is bound up in silk cords, lifting him with her forelegs to drag him away. She doesn't hear Sam's cries until he's close enough to lunge forward and grab Sting from the ground where it fell. Sam doesn't stop to think about whether he's "brave, or loyal, or filled with rage." He charges at the monster, fiercer than any small animal attacking a larger one to save its mate. As Shelob turns to face Sam, "a fury" greater than she'd seen in years, he cleaves off her claw, then lunges between her legs to stab one of her eyes.

By describing Sam's motivations in attacking Shelob, the narrator portrays Sam as a model of heroism. He is driven by his love for Frodo and his need to protect him and doesn't waste time wondering what his actions will mean for him personally. Sam has proven himself willing to face mortal danger for Frodo before, and he does so once again. His "fury," energy, and devotion makes him a truly formidable enemy against Shelob.



Sam is now directly beneath Shelob, out of reach of her claws. He slashes at her underbelly "with desperate strength," but his blow doesn't pierce her thick hide. Shelob lifts up her belly and brings it down on top of Sam, intending to crush him, but Sam still holds Frodo's elven blade pointing up. With her own strength, she drives the sword up into her belly as Sam is crushed into the ground. She shudders, feeling pain she's never experienced before, and springs up again.

Simply by remaining steadfast and holding tightly to his sword, Sam achieves a feat no other warrior ever has—Shelob has never before been so gravely injured. Ultimately, through a small hobbit and an elven sword, Shelob brings about her own downfall as her power and evil are turned back on her.



Sam falls to his knees by Frodo, still holding the sword and light-headed with the stench. Watching Frodo's face, Sam eventually drags himself out of his daze. He looks back at Shelob, injured and crouching to spring on him again. As Sam faces her, a thought comes to him like a spoken reminder, and he pulls out the **phial**, shouting Galadriel's name. Far off, he hears the voices of the elves, and his own voice cries out in their language. He pushes himself to his feet, and suddenly he's only himself again, Samwise the hobbit.

Again, the phial—or the power it channels—speaks to Sam, who is able to hear it even in the midst of his rage and fear. Like Frodo, Sam is moved to speak an elvish language, but now he's also able to hear the collective voices of the elves he met near the Shire and the music from the house of Elrond. After lending him their strength and support, the voices vanish.



Sam shouts at Shelob that she's hurt his master and she'll pay for it. The **phial** of Galadriel blazes with starlight, scorching Shelob's face. She falls back, blinded, then begins to crawl towards the opening in the cliff. Sam follows her, shaken and reeling, and makes a last slash at her legs as she disappears into the hole.

Though Shelob was undaunted by Frodo's elven war cry, Sam's invocation to Varda (the Queen of the Valar and the creator of the stars) frightens her. So does the light from the phial which, fueled by Sam's powerful spirit, shines brighter than it did for Frodo. The narrator doesn't specify whether Shelob ever recovers from her wounds or has simply crawled away to die.



Sam crawls back to Frodo, who is pale and motionless and doesn't respond when Sam speaks to him. Sam cuts the cords away but can't find any signs of life. He begs Frodo to wake up and not leave him alone, but Frodo's body is cold. Sam recognizes Frodo's face as the image he saw in the mirror of Galadriel—not asleep, as he'd assumed, but dead. For a time, as he sits beside Frodo, his despair leaves him senseless.

Sam doesn't know how much time has passed when he lifts his head again, but nothing has changed—Frodo is still dead. Asking himself what he should do, he recalls what he told Frodo at the beginning of their journey, that he felt he had something to before the end. But he doesn't know if he has to leave Frodo behind unburied, or go home, or go on to Mount Doom without him, and at last he begins to cry. He arranges Frodo's body in his cloak with his own sword beside him. Taking Sting and the **phial** of Galadriel—though he feels he doesn't deserve it—for himself, he tries to explain to Frodo that he has to go on.

Sam kneels, holding Frodo's hand, but can't bring himself to let it go yet, still debating "in his heart" about what to do. He tries to motivate himself to continue his journey by stoking his anger and thinking of vengeance on Gollum but decides that that wouldn't be worth leaving Frodo. It wouldn't bring him back. Sam would rather be dead with Frodo than leave him, and looks briefly at the sword in his hand. But Sam's death wouldn't solve anything, either, and he determines again that he must go on.

Sam wonders how he can carry the **Ring**, since the Council gave it to Frodo, but he remembers that the Council also sent Frodo with friends to help him bear the load and complete the quest. Sam, as the last of the Company, has to do it, though he wishes that someone else, like Gandalf, were there with him. He's certain that, by himself, he'll make the wrong decision, and still feels that it isn't his place to take up the Ring.

Like Frodo's vision in Galadriel's mirror of the army at the gates of Mordor, Sam's vision has revealed itself to be an omen of great loss. With Frodo dead, Sam's duty and purpose are gone, along with his capacity for joy and optimism. Lacking all hope, Sam gives in to despair as he never has before.



It's clear to Sam that he must still have some purpose, and something left to do, but he can't see what it is. For the entirety of the quest, his only purpose has been his devotion to Frodo. His task now is to determine who he has the greatest duty to—Frodo, Frodo's quest, the world, or himself—and how to best fulfill that duty. Like Aragorn's decision after the breaking of the Fellowship, it's an agonizing choice. Sam is lost without Frodo; he can't understand his place in the world.



With Frodo dead, Sam recognizes the worthlessness of revenge on Gollum. Nothing about Gollum is worth leaving Frodo, and no vengeance, however much deserved, could compel him to. Despair is a natural emotion, but it is also the enemy's weapon. It worsens Sam's conflict over his choices and nearly leads him to give up on the quest and the world entirely. If his duty was to stay with Frodo, and Frodo is dead, it seems only natural to him that he should be dead, too. His emotional conflict fuels his indecision, and he struggles to motivate himself to do anything at all. Yet, his devotion to his duty—still unclear but certainly important—triumphs over his fear and aversion to going on without Frodo.



Though Sam's logic tells him that his only real choice is to take up Frodo's burden and complete the quest, he feels strongly and instinctively that it's the wrong choice. Still, adopting Frodo's duty as his own is the natural extension of acting as Frodo's help and support throughout the quest. What Frodo can't do for himself, Sam does for him.



But if Sam isn't the right person to carry the **Ring**, then neither was Frodo, who didn't choose his burden initially when he set out from Bag End. Sam has to make up his own mind, even if he's sure things will go wrong. He can't leave the Ring with Frodo's body because the enemy might find it, and there isn't time to carry the Ring back to the west to get advice since the war has already started. He knows he has no choice but to take the Ring.

Sam gently removes Frodo's necklace and kisses his forehead, whispering goodbye and asking Frodo for forgiveness for leaving him. He has one wish, to return one day and find Frodo again. Sam puts the chain around his own neck and immediately feels the weight of the **Ring**. As strength grows in him, however, he discovers that he can bear the burden. He uses the **phial** to take a last look at Frodo, who has an elvish beauty in his pale face, then puts the light away and walks into the dark towards the cleft.

Sam reaches another staircase directly under the orc tower, muttering to himself that he's made up his mind about what to do, though he still hasn't. He wonders if he's doing the wrong thing and looks back one more time towards Frodo in the dark before he reluctantly walks down the stairs. He only takes a few steps before he hears orc voices. He's surrounded, though the orcs can't see him yet, and panics for a moment about how his indecision has ruined everything. As he tries to think of how he can save the **Ring**, he finds himself slipping it out of his shirt and putting it on.

Sam's hearing sharpens and his sight dims, the world around him becoming vague and hazy. He doesn't feel invisible, but strangely exposed, and knows the eye of Sauron is looking for him. As Sam cowers against the cliff, the orcs pass him by. He can clearly hear them talking and understand their speech. Two orcs named Gorbag and Shagrat notice Frodo's body lying in the road.

Sam jumps up, realizing suddenly that the quest and all his decisions are less important than being at Frodo's side, where he belongs. He runs back down the path towards Frodo, wondering how many orcs he can kill before they catch him and if any songs will be written about it after his death. Then he remembers that no one will write songs about him because the **Ring** will be taken by the enemy and there won't be any more songs at all. But Sam can't help that, and he can't bear the Ring without Frodo.

Sam now fits into his own understanding of a hero from his conversation with Frodo about stories. He, like Frodo, must simply accept the responsibility of a quest when it comes to him. Though he feels certain that it's the wrong choice, he doesn't know what else to do besides give up entirely, and he's already decided against that. It's likely that any choice would feel like the wrong one, now that Frodo's dead.



Though Sam's grief doesn't go away, despair no longer incapacitates him. He begins to console himself again with tentative optimism (in his plan to return for Frodo's body) and his continued devotion to Frodo, which he expresses by taking up his quest. With the knowledge that he's honoring Frodo in the best way he knows how, Sam finds the fortitude to bear the Ring.



Sam's head and heart remain in conflict over what his duty is. He knows he has to continue the quest to destroy the Ring for the good of Middle-earth, but, at the same time, he's unwilling to leave Frodo's body. His insistent feeling that he shouldn't leave Frodo indicates that there may be more to the situation than he understands—his intuition has often proven wiser than his judgement.



It only takes a moment of fear and panic for the Ring to compel Sam to put it on. Though Sam's hidden from the orcs' sight, the Ring doesn't offer true protection, but rather leaves him exposed to both Sauron's gaze and the Ring's own corrupting influence.



Sam gives in to his intuition. Though he can't justify it to himself, he knows his first duty is to stay with Frodo, even at the cost of the capture of the Ring and the end of the world. In that moment, he values Frodo over victory, fame and glory, his own life, and the lives of everyone depending on the quest.



Sam is tired and slow. By the time he reaches the place where he left Frodo, the orcs have already carried his body away. Sam follows, listening as Gorbag and Shagrat speak briefly of Shelob, then mention that they have something that Sauron wants. The orcs pass through the tunnel that Sam and Frodo had found blocked, somehow opening it and passing through before Sam can follow. The stone won't budge, but Sam can still hear the orcs on the other side of the stone and hopes to learn something useful.

Shagrat, who was supposed to be guarding the stairs, saw strange lights, as well as Shelob and her "sneak," Gollum. Shagrat thought that Gollum, who is allowed to pass through Cirith Ungol, was just bringing Shelob food. Gorbag is certain that there was more than one intruder, since someone must have cut the cords away from Frodo, and wonders who would have been able to stab Shelob when no one ever has before. He guesses that there's an elf warrior somewhere nearby.

Shagrat plans to have "a look" at Frodo to see what he can find out about him. Gorbag doesn't think that they'll discover much from Frodo, who he guesses isn't important since the elf warrior just left him on the ground. Shagrat says that they have orders to strip and search any trespasser but keep them safe until Sauron sends for them. Gorbag wonders why the prisoner needs to be safe, and Shagrat calls him a fool for not realizing that Shelob doesn't eat dead meat. Frodo is alive.

Sam is astonished, almost fainting. He knew in his heart that Frodo wasn't dead and chastises himself—he shouldn't trust his head because it "isn't the best part" of him. Shagrat explains that Shelob paralyzes her victims, meaning Frodo will wake up in a few hours, and insists that he be kept safe. The voices fade away from Sam, who is furious with himself for making the wrong choices, as he knew he would. His only instruction was to not leave Frodo, and now that he has, he resolves to get back to him.

Drawing his sword, Sam uses the light to see that the stone, which is probably only meant to keep Shelob out, has a small open space at the top. Finding new energy now that he knows Frodo is alive, Sam pulls himself over the stone and runs after the orcs again. He hears Shagrat and Gorbag discussing where to keep Frodo and charges around the corner to attack them, only to realize he misjudged the distance because of the sharpened hearing the **Ring** gives him. The orcs are far ahead, nearing the gate, which swings shut after they pass through. Sam throws himself fruitlessly against it and falls to the ground in the dark. Frodo has been taken by the enemy.

Sam is one step behind the orcs, as he's one step behind understanding his own feelings and responsibilities. Still, he's dogged in his pursuit of Frodo's body now that he's made up his mind about what to do, and his fear and doubt have left him. Now a physical obstacle has replaced his mental turmoil in preventing him from staying with Frodo.



Shagrat reveals that Gollum's fate was settled long before Sam started calling him a sneak. Names have power, but they have power primarily because they reveal truth about their subjects. Again, Sam's enemies perceive him as far fiercer than he conceives of himself. His battle with Shelob was born of desperation, but both his effort and the results were legendary.



Sam's heart has guided him correctly yet again, intuiting that Frodo was alive even when he appeared dead. Though the Fellowship assumes that Sauron doesn't know about the plan to destroy the Ring, Sauron is still searching for the Ring-bearer. By thinking Frodo was dead and taking the Ring from him, Sam has accidentally saved the Ring from capture by Sauron's orcs.



Though he initially ignored them, Sam's feelings and his intuition have guided him back to Frodo. After briefly abandoning his most important duty in his grief, Sam is determined and clearheaded—he has to get back to Frodo, free him, and continue supporting him through the remainder of the quest.



Though Sam feels he has failed in his duty to protect Frodo, and the novel ends on a somber note, things aren't yet hopeless. Sam and Frodo are separated, but Sam's powerful devotion to Frodo ensures that he won't abandon his duty again. Even if it means putting the Ring—and the fate of Middle-earth—at risk, he'll stop at nothing to rescue his beloved friend.





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