

Fellowship & Fairydust



Tolkien:
The Man of
Masterpieces

*Fellowship
&
Fairydust*

Editor-in-Chief

Avellina Balestri

Assistant Editor

Sarah Levesque

Cover by

Byrnwiga

Graphic Designers

See page 113

Questions?

Comments?

Want to read more?

Check out our
website and blog at

**Fellowshipand
Fairydust.com**



TABLE OF

Editor's Note - Avellina Balestri - 4

More Than A Memory Conference Details - 6

Springtime with Tolkien - Danny Oscar Rutillio - 7

Struck by Lightning - Swan White - 10

Never Too Young - Elwen of the Hidden Valley - 11

Sins of the Eldar - Hikari-Katana - 24

**The Tale of Smeagol/Gollum, Bilbo, and the Ring of
Power - Donna Ferguson Dudley - 31**

**Manwaelmelwe, Protector of Middle Earth -
Caitey M Gehan - 32**

**Tolkien, Maker of Middle Earth -
Martina Juričková - 34**

Thorongil - Christopher Woods - 39

**Reflections on *Lord of the Rings* -
Isabella Summitt - 47**

Strength - Danika Cooper - 49

**The Prayers at the Foot of the Altar -
Michael J. Carroll - 52**

CONTENTS

A Chance for Faramir - Sarah Levesque - 56

For Wrath, For Ruin - Avellina Balestri - 57

Why I Don't Like *Lord of the Rings* - Katie Hanna - 61

What Eowyn Saw - RangeroftheNorth52 - 63

**The Man Who Painted Leaves -
MariaTeresa Carzon - 67**

Creatures of Hobbit - Hope Bollinger - 69

The Lady of Rohan - Killarney Traynor - 70

Two Sides of Womanly Beauty - Hannah Vincent - 79

Another Magical Ring - Amanda Pizzolatto - 82

**How Harry Healed My Inner Frodo -
Michael Haldas - 89**

**Tolkien Was Wise to Put the Kibosh on the Fourth Age -
Kevin Michael Derby - 95**

Dragons, Bears & Birds - Alku04 - 97

May He Live Forever - Adeel Ahmed - 105

Our Next Issue - 114

Fellowship & Fairydust

All articles and artwork belong to their respective creators and may not be copied without permission.

We lay no claim to franchises or characters from franchises mentioned in this magazine; each is copyrighted by its own publishers and/or studios. All are used here for entertainment purposes only. See page 112 for more information and go to our website for complete disclaimers.

Image credits may be found on pg 113

Editor

“The world is indeed full of peril, and in it there are many dark places; but still there is much that is fair, and though in all lands love is now mingled with grief, it grows perhaps the greater.” - JRR Tolkien

My introduction to the works of JRR Tolkien came when I was quite young, surrounded by students at home-school co-op who were nigh obsessed with playing Lord of the Rings themed word games which were rather over my head. At the time, I was far more interested in more real-world realms with heroes I felt easier to imagine myself working with, such as Robin Hood, the Lone Ranger, and Sherlock Holmes. Indeed, this is still largely true, with my heartstrings still deeply tied to the subject of history over and above the genre of fantasy.

However, I was reintroduced to the “Ringer” phenomena in my high school years, mainly through the interest of friends who had adventured into the realm of Middle Earth in their pre-teen years and continued to be avid fans, readers, and watchers. While I had my misgivings about the endeavor, I did ultimately agree to check out the first film in Peter Jackson’s famous trilogy adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, and I must say I found my first viewing of *The Fellowship of the Ring* to be a rather surreal experience. Cinematically, it managed to capture the complex layers Tolkien had put into his otherworldly epic, with the dramatic backdrop of New Zealand and stunning special effects to bring Middle Earth to life.

But more than that was the sense of spiritual poignancy present in the story, revealed most keenly to me through the death of Boromir. From a Catholic perspective, there is something keenly sacramental about the scene as Aragorn, the healer-king, takes on an almost priestly function in bringing about Boromir’s redemption after he tries to lay hold of the One Ring and is subsequently shot with arrows trying to defend the hobbits unable to defend themselves. It was a profoundly haunting and moving scene that lingered in my dreams for nights afterwards, and inspired me to go on to watch the following two films, complete with their colossal battles and very literal cliff-hangers (or should be say, volcano hangers).

Although unspoken, there was a continued sense of spirituality below the surface, a reflection flitting in and out of the shadows of Christ carrying His Cross, the true wage of sin. I would go on to learn later that, according to Tolkien’s calendar system for Middle Earth, the Ring - the ultimate symbol of evil - was supposed to have been destroyed on March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation and traditionally also believed to be the day the world was created and the day Christ died on Calvary. While there is no single Christ-figure like C.S. Lewis’ Aslan the Lion in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (nor indeed would Tolkien ever have wished it to be so, since he greatly disliked direct allegory), we see glimpses of Christ almost everywhere in *The Lord of the Rings* through the faces of the characters who struggle with the ultimate spiritual test, just as we should see Christ’s face in our brothers and sisters in our own world.

Although everyone has their own unique perspective on his works and the inspiration behind them, ranging from religion to history to post-traumatic stress on the part of the author, it is unquestioned that Tolkien, without abandoning his morals or his profound sense of Christological insight, has had an incalculable effect on the world of literature and the expansion of the imagination. He not only took the genre of fantasy to new “adult” levels through his mythological worth-building, but also instilled his fantasy universe with a truly religious presence in which all magic must have a meaning. He coined the terms “sacramental imagination” and “sub-creation” to describe the spiritual aspects of the creative process, and passed on this legacy to all Christian artists to come.

“We have come from God,” he wrote, “and inevitably the myths woven by us...will also reflect a splintered

's Note

fragment of the true light, the eternal truth that is with God.”

Tolkien's time was full of turmoil and change for the British people. Two world wars with only one generation in between, economic depressions, and the collapse of a profitable empire left the Brits at the mercy of other nations to help them regain their bearings. But they would never be top nation again and that put an irreparable dent in British pride. In addition to this, traditional societal norms were being challenged and changed, some for the better and some for the worse. In 20th century British literature, there was a rise in dark and edgy storylines involving loss of identity and the unstoppable crumbling of society, such as dystopian classics *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, *1984* by George Orwell, and *Watership Down* by Richard Adams.

But Tolkien was a different man than many of his contemporaries. While his works are often surreal, disturbing, and haunted by otherworldly realities that mirror all-too-worldly ones, his universality is based in the fact that he rejected cynicism, and this made him a rebel for hope in an age of despair. He believed that honor, loyalty, courage, friendship, and above all love would still win out in the end, and indeed by their very natures, would endure through every kind of corruption. For evil, he believed, was merely a shadow of the good, not a thing in and of itself, and therefore it spelt out its own demise.

In drawing truth from the world of myth, and his desire to create a mythology for the Anglo-Saxon people, Tolkien's Catholic worldview gave his stories a deep and abiding grounding in the theological virtues, a belief that things can change for the better, that individuals can build up as well as tear down, and that there is a light that can never be extinguished, even when things look the darkest. He believed that the memories of Eden might still thrill our hearts, even in a broken and fallen world, and that God's providence still reached out to guide our paths. He was a true Romantic; he believed that true love could still conquer all, and that mercy, as Pope St. John Paul II described it, is Love's second name.

“For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing,” Tolkien wrote for his iconic character of Samwise Gamgee. “There was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach.”

It is my hope and prayer that this issue may bring a shaft of light and high beauty to our readership, showcasing the talents of our staff & contributors in keeping Tolkien's legacy of faith, creativity, spirituality, and artistry alive.

May the wind under your wings bear you where the sun sails and the moon walks!



Avellina Balestri,
Editor-in-Chief
Fellowship & Fairydust Publications

A TOLKIEN
SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE

WWW.SACRAMENTALIMAGINATION.COM



"NOT ALL THOSE
WHO WANDER
ARE LOST"

MORE THAN MEMORY

25-26 | MAY | 2019

VENUE

Simpkins Lee Theatre and Monson Room
Lady Margaret Hall
Oxford, UK



A CONFERENCE CELEBRATING THE SPIRITUAL IMAGINATION
& ARTISTIC LEGACY OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN

Springtime with Tolkien

DANNY OSCAR RUTILLIO

Springtime is finally here! With its arrival, so too come the gentle splendour of apple blossoms, the magnificence of creamy magnolia and the simple patchwork of a daisy-covered lawn. You may be startled this month by a blue sky, or caught in silent thought at the playfulness of a morning breeze amongst idle trees.

With all this surrounding beauty our hearts can be drawn to contemplate the wonder of God's loving care and be refreshed. In the joy of the simple harmony of beautiful sights, we can find both delight and mystery that awakens the best parts of our nature.

I have been reading Stratford Caldecott's *The Power of the Ring: The Spiritual Vision behind the Lord of the Rings*. For those who don't know the author, he, like Tolkien, is a Catholic writer exploring the relationship between truth and beauty. His new revised book is about Tolkien's spiritual vision. In it he looks at Tolkien's faith and his writing in the pursuit of truth as a healing process, which he thinks can help society.

On completing the book in one reading, I thought a few points were worthy of a springtime meditation that can renew our hearts with gratitude for God's goodness as creation unfurls around us. One of the best sentences in the book comes about halfway through. Trying to grasp the essence of Tolkien's writings, Caldecott reflects:

Through myth, through poetry, Tolkien has evoked a feeling beyond words that comes from the deepest levels of our nature, a yearning that God has implanted in us. That feeling is a sign that we are called back to the light.

For Caldecott, this journey back to the light is the singing heart of all Tolkien's legendarium, a light that guides towards final reconciliation. Interestingly, Caldecott makes a link at this point with Tolkien's devotion to the Virgin Mary. He quotes Tolkien as reported by a friend George Sayer:

I attribute whatever there is of beauty and goodness in my work to the influence of the Holy Mother of God.

Tolkien saw natural things overflowing with a depth of meaning, sourced in the mind of God, and in his view the Virgin was "the most perfect of God's creatures." She was the heart of Tolkien's spiritual life. The model for showing us how to be receptive to the light of God's will. As Caldecott explains:

But at the feet of Mary the ground is green with grass and bright with flowers ... This is the Mary who is ever-present to Tolkien, at the centre of his imagination, mantled by all natural beauty.



Mary can give a new springtime to our hearts too. She does this by leading us to the beauty of her Son. The Son for whom the whole of creation is made for, and finds its completion in. We can meet her in the rosary and ask her to pray for us with simple faith and trust.

Let us remember her in this spring, in the peaceful sunshine and new choruses of birdsong. Let us remember she who "is the way the cosmos is joined to God" and let us in the words of Tolkien:

Praise the Lord with all mountains and hills, all orchards and forests, all things that creep and birds on the wing.





The
Lonely
Mountain

Struck
by
Lightning

By Swan White

Leave behind your hobbit holes,
and try your luck with tricking trolls
under hill,
and over hill,
and to the lonely mountain!

Forget your well-stocked pantry shelves,
and listen for the songs of elves
under hill,
and over hill,
and to the lonely mountain!

Kindle hope from the smallest spark,
make riddles in the deepest dark
under hill,
and over hill,
and to the lonely mountain!

Wear a sword instead of a stick,
so the spiderlings may feel the prick
under hill,
and over hill,
and to the lonely mountain!

Your Tookish side is wide awake!
So burgle the sleeping fire-drake!
under hill,
and over hill,
and in the lonely mountain!

It's true, there will be aching feet
and less than what you'd like to eat
but the world is waiting down the street
under hill,
and over hill,
and to the lonely mountain!

Never Too Young to Start Again

by Vanessa Parry (alias Elven of the Hidden Valley)

“Come on, you maggots! Leave it. It'll die soon enough and the sun's coming up.”

“Can't we take it with us?”

“It's not worth the trouble ... all skin and bone. There's not a decent mouthful on it.”

“It could make a stew if we boiled it long enough.”

“Then you carry it. But if you gets caught out in the daylight, yer on yer own.”

“Leave it, Grob. There's plenty of meat in the tunnels.”

It let out a shaky breath as iron-bound feet thundered off into the pre-dawn mist. Aragorn, son of Arathorn, waited until they were no more than a distant rumble in the earth before trying to lever himself up on trembling arms. His first attempt ended in a cry of pain and dropped him straight back to the stony ground. For his next one, he used only his left arm and managed to sit up, with a tight groan. Gritting his teeth, he raised his right arm to examine the injury in his bicep. One look at the gaping edges of a ragged wound had him rolling to the side, to empty his stomach on the trampled grass.

Wiping his mouth with the back of a hand, Aragorn decided to postpone another bout of nausea by taking the time to look about him. The body of a large orc had his heart thumping, until he realised that its leather-clad chest was not moving. When he calmed sufficiently, memory presented a blow-by-blow account of the encounter with his attackers. He had been doing well enough when dealing with only two, then another five jumped into the fray. Aragorn congratulated himself on at least managing to dispatch one before being overwhelmed.



The contents of his small pack were scattered all about him. It was fortunate that the tiny surgical kit had been ignored by his assailants, who were interested only in food or weapons. Luck was on his side, it seemed, although he would have considered himself luckier had he not encountered the orcs at all. At least their leader had been correct about the sunrise, for the sky began to lighten, revealing Aragorn's untouched water skin, a mercy which saved him having to seek out a stream to cleanse his injuries. Already, he could feel a buzzing in his head, which hinted at a loss of blood at the least and poison at the worst. He wondered sometimes whether orcs deliberately laced their blades with poison, or whether they were just so filthy that the weapons bred their own.

Soft cloths had also been ignored and he wet one before using it to swab his injuries. Most were shallow, but the one on his upper arm was more troublesome. Almost fainting, he had to rest for several minutes before hand and eye were steady enough to thread a needle. Elrond had insisted that he learn to tie a stitch with either hand, but Aragorn had not the dexterity of an elf, and favoured his right. Unfortunately, that was the injured arm, so he offered up a prayer to the Valar as he took the needle in his left hand and tried to draw together the edges of the ragged cut. The result was not pretty and he had to stop once to discharge the remaining contents of his stomach.



Half an hour later, Aragorn had scavenged what possessions he could, including Narsil, whose broken remains the orcs had ignored, and stood swaying upon unsteady feet. Now he paused, undecided. To the east lay Mirkwood. Whilst he was certain of a welcome from Legolas, he was less certain of Thranduil. Were his son not at home, Thranduil was as likely to thrust Aragorn into the care of a gaoler as a healer, for mortals were tolerated at best within the halls of the woodland king. To the south lay the lands of Lord Celeborn and the Lady Galadriel. Even were he not reluctant to sojourn there, the ancient elven land of Lorien was guarded by more than bow and sword. If its rulers did not wish to grant entry, no entry would be found.

To his west lay the Misty Mountains. There he had been raised, within the sheltered valley of Imladris. At one time he would not have hesitated, but all that had changed five years ago. Now, Aragorn considered Rivendell closed to him and, although he knew of the lands of Rohan and Gondor, he had not yet ventured so far. Until his recent acquaintance with Legolas, Aragorn had explored only a little of the lands east of the Misty Mountains, and travelled west only as far as the borders of the Shire. He recalled that Bree, at least, had a decent inn and a healer. Drawing his cloak about him, Aragorn therefore turned west. He was already in the foothills, and if the weather held, he could make it across the mountains in only a few days.

He determinedly ignored the small voice in his head warning him that he was being overly optimistic in the assessment of his strength. By evening of the first day, Aragorn knew that he was in trouble. The mild buzzing in his ears had grown, along with a headache and the beginnings of a fever. When he stopped for the night in the lee of an outcrop of granite, he made time before sleeping to strip a long branch that he had scavenged lower down the mountain slopes. He would probably need it in the morning, for he had already stumbled several times. The following day, he awoke to find the world behaving in strange ways, revolving and tripping him up, turning yellow and then grey, hot and then cold. Were it not for the support of his new staff, Aragorn would have fallen many times. As he climbed higher, the world grew darker and at first he thought it another trick of his eyes, until he felt the first raindrops. Combined with a fever and pain from his wounds, the rain finally succeeded in overwhelming his strong constitution, and by midday he was huddled beneath an overhang, barely aware of anything beyond his fever-driven nightmares. Later, he would have no memory of the resumption of his journey.

The trail was poorly maintained ... a discouragement to all but the most determined. A recent deluge had battered its surface to a muddy slick, a danger to the life and limb of any traveller, of which there were few. That two should encounter each other, therefore, hinted at more than chance.

From his sparse shelter beneath a wind-blasted birch tree, Gandalf blew smoke rings as he cast an assessing eye over the tall figure who was staggering closer, clearly in difficulty, even with the aid of a roughly trimmed staff. The man bore all the height and dark colouring that marked out descendants of the men of Numenor. A battered and empty scabbard flapped at his side, and upon broad shoulders a bow and empty quiver shared space with an equally battered pack. Indeed, everything about the traveller was battered, which looked incongruous on one so young. Perhaps this was one of the Rangers of the north, although it was not usual for them to travel alone, especially when apparently barely out of their twenties.

The man dragged his unfocused grey gaze from the ground before him, frowning at Gandalf for a moment. Then a misstep tangled the empty scabbard between long legs, pitching him forward to lie, unmoving, in the mire. Gandalf sighed. The Valar seemed to take a perverse delight in dropping trouble at his feet, but rarely were they so literal about it. The Grey Pilgrim strode forward to investigate, dropping to his knees in the mud, to roll the figure.

A thick layer of grime made it difficult to see anything. Clearly, this was not the first time body and ground had made intimate acquaintance. Also clear were the bloodied rents in dark clothing, makeshift bandages, and fever heat beneath the rescuer's assessing fingers.

Gandalf grunted as he hoisted the muddy figure over his shoulder. The *broa* of an old man was his by choice, and belied his power and strength, but the youngster was tall and very solidly built, for all his lack of girth. Gathering up his staff, Gandalf hoped that, having arranged for the placing of this man in his care, the Valar would also arrange for him to find a decent patch of dry ground, not too far distant.



Warmth against his left side. That was Aragorn's first awareness, swiftly followed by a succession of disjointed memories. The world wavering in and out of focus. Lifting eyes from his boots to frown at a straggly tree, which seemed to be blowing smoke rings. Pitching forward again. His forehead making contact with probably the only hard patch of trail surface for miles. Darkness.

He lay still, trying to establish his current situation without opening his eyes. A fire could mean either help or that he was to be the next course on an orc's menu. Senses listed the tang of wood-smoke and crackle of a small fire, the confining warmth of a blanket or cloak, hard ground beneath his back, and the lingering scent of pipeweed combined with that of cooked meat. His wounds no longer burned and the fever had abated, although he could still feel it smouldering, deep within his abused flesh. He took it as a good sign that the scent of food was making him feel hungry. It also implied that he was not about to be broiled for dinner.

"You need not dissemble. I intend you no harm and, if you open your eyes, I will help you to sit up. Then you can try some of the coney stew." The voice was burred with age and yet strong, holding a hint of mild amusement.

Aragorn followed instruction, blinking at the brilliance of a campfire against the black night sky. Slowly, the scene drew into focus. He was lying upon his back beneath the combined canopy of a pair of birch trees, although there were few leaves left this late in the year, and stars peeped shyly from between the branches. Strong arms suddenly slipped beneath his shoulders, levering him to a sitting position and supporting, as Aragorn fought to stay upright. For several breaths the world spiralled about him, but finally steadied, just in time to forestall his dry heaving. He knew it would be dry heaving, because it had been some time since he last consumed anything other than water. The orcs had stolen what food they had not trampled into the earth.

Glancing aside, he stared into a bearded and deeply seamed face, beneath the shadow of a wide-brimmed and extravagantly pointed hat. The mouth was almost hidden amid a long and tangled grey beard, but when it drew into a smile, a network of wrinkles about keen grey eyes showed that laughter was no stranger to his features.

Aragorn cleared his throat, uncertain what his voice would sound like after so many days alone, and relieved when it appeared to hold at least a close approximation of its usual timbre. "Thank you for your aid, Master...?"

The elderly gentleman straightened, leaving Aragorn to find his balance alone. His voice now carried the gravitas of one who expected to be recognised. "I am Gandalf the Grey." He raised bushy eyebrows, "And you are...?"

Aragorn released a hand from the confining blanket. Now he laid it upon his heart, bowing his head, as his elven foster father had taught him. "One of the five wizards. I am honoured, sir. My name is Aragorn."

Those grey eyes narrowed and Aragorn had the uncomfortable feeling that he used to have sometimes with his foster father, that he was being examined to the very core of his being. "Arathorn's son. I met your father a few times. You favour him in looks, which is no mean feat in one so young, for he was ever stern of countenance. I believe you and I met once, in your youth, although you bore a different name then. You seem to have fallen upon hard times and made a few enemies, young chieftain."

Much to Aragorn's relief, Gandalf poured some hot stew into a bowl and handed it over, with a chunk of dry, but still edible, bread. Recalling Elrond's injunctions about eating too much after a fast, Aragorn sopped the bread in some broth first, chewing slowly as he tried to recall encountering this strange personage. Finally, he had to confess, "I'm afraid I don't remember our meeting." Gandalf pursed his lips, appearing a little offended. "I travelled in the company of several dwarves and a hobbit."

Enlightenment drew a gasp.
"I remember now. You came to the library."

"I did, indeed. Your cat showed me the way. A very polite lady. I must say that I am disappointed that our introduction was so unmemorable to you."

"I apologise, although, as I recall, we did not exchange more than a few words."

Gandalf cleared his throat. "Yes, well. How came you to be traveling alone with such injuries? I hope your companions are not dead."

"I was scouting alone, among the eastern foothills, when I was set upon by a party of orcs."

"I recognised their handiwork." Gandalf helped himself to a portion of the thin stew. "Some of your wounds still show signs of their poisons, although I note that you have at least attempted to clean and stitch them. You were obviously trained well, and I only took the liberty of redressing them for you."



"How long have I been in your care? I remember nothing beyond walking the road and then falling."

"You fell more than once, I think. Your clothes suggest several arguments with the earth, all of which you appear to have lost. Your last fall was early this afternoon, and it is now almost midnight. You would be wise to rest until morning."

"Midnight?" Aragorn squinted at the heavens once more. By the location of the sword belt of Menelmacar, it was, indeed, close to midnight. Swallowing the last of the bread and washing it down with a final mouthful of broth, he stood, intending to wash out his bowl and offer his goodbyes. A surprisingly strong arm came about his waist as he almost toppled into the fire.



"Young people. They never listen to their elders." Now Aragorn was forced down so firmly that he landed on his rump with a squawk of surprise. "We shall not be moving on until daylight, young sir. So, you may as well make yourself comfortable."

Aragorn bridled at his treatment. "Whilst I appreciate your care, I have been looking after myself for several years now."

Gandalf tapped a new bandage about Aragorn's brow, drawing a hiss from the young man. The wizard's voice carried more gentle amusement than sarcasm as he said, "And you have obviously been doing so well."

Aragorn blew out a deep breath. "It was a large party of orcs."

Gandalf settled himself comfortably again, adding more branches to the small fire. "Indeed? And where do you travel now, in such haste?"

"I was making my way to Bree."

"On the other side of the mountains? You will never make it. Even after my tender ministrations, you cannot walk so far. You need rest and proper care."

"Bree is the closest town from here."

"If, as you say, you were injured in the eastern foothills, you have already travelled far. Surely Lord Elrond will aid you, of all people. He told me you were as a son to him."

"I am no longer certain of my welcome there."

Gandalf tugged his pipe from the forked tip of his staff, and a pouch from some pocket deep within his tattered and muddy robes. "I heard of your encounter with the lady Arwen. Elrond said you were quite taken with his daughter."

Aragorn nodded, mesmerised as he watched Gandalf pack golden weed into the small bowl of his pipe. "She is far above me, and Lord Elrond has forbidden me to court her, unless I become king."

"And do you intend to become king?" the wizard asked as he seemed to kindle his pipe from thin air.

"Do I look like a monarch in waiting?" Aragorn asked on a sigh, as he made an ineffectual attempt to brush dried mud from his breeches.

"I confess, I have never seen one, so I cannot express an opinion upon the matter. However, it does seem to me that walking the land and developing an understanding of its many peoples is a very good place to begin." Gandalf tilted back his head to blow a fragrant cloud of smoke at the stars.

"I have acquired the skill of walking, at least. As for the understanding of people ... that is proving more difficult. So far, most of the ones I encountered have precluded any understanding, beyond their desire to kill me. Upon first acquaintance, even Legolas' troop fired warning arrows."

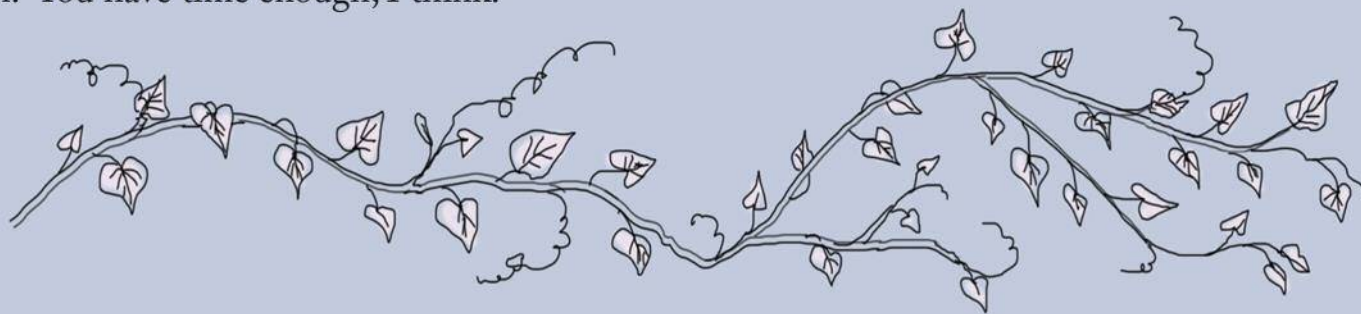
"You have met Thranduil's son? Excellent. I agree that Thranduil is a little, shall we say, territorial? But who else have you met?"

Aragorn waved about them, where all was cloaked in darkness. "People are few and far between in these lands, nowadays. I have seen Dale, but could not gain admittance to Erebor. Beyond that, my wanderings have taken me to isolated farming communities, mainly."

"What of your own people? Surely they eagerly await the return of their chieftain."

Aragorn cleared his throat, uncomfortably. "They were willing to take me in, but I knew nothing of their customs, and they were long used to living without their chieftain. I suppose I could have stayed, and would probably have found my place among them, given time, but I am no elf or istari. My years in Middle Earth are limited."

Gandalf chuckled. "I see. You mean that you are young and have not the time to waste on such mundane things as getting to know people, when there are dragons to be slain." Aragorn was permitted no time to express offence as his elder continued. "Yet you have wasted years wandering aimlessly. You are of the people of Numenor, and may expect a life at least twice that of an ordinary man. You have time enough, I think."



Pulling the blanket more securely about his shoulders, Aragorn stirred the fire with a stray stick as he muttered sullenly, "I search for purpose."

"Then may I suggest that you seek purpose in more salubrious surroundings? Imladris is much closer than Bree and, frankly, better appointed."

Aragorn could not hold back a scowl. "I have already told you that I am uncertain of my welcome. I left there in some haste."

Gandalf tapped the dottle from his pipe, testing the draw before slipping it back into the top of his staff. "As I understand it, that haste was not of Lord Elrond's insistence."

Weakness prevented Aragorn from withholding a peevish tone. "There seemed little point in my remaining in the presence of she whom I cannot hope to win. Why cause myself more pain?"

"There speaks youth, indeed." Gandalf shook his head. "But that will not be an issue at present, for the Lady Arwen resides once more in Lorien, with her grandparents. I travel to Imladris myself, to consult your foster father upon another matter. Will you not accept both my aid and his? I have some healing skill, but I am no match for his gentle hand."

Too weary to continue the argument, Aragorn capitulated upon a sigh. "Very well, master wizard."

A wave of heat that had nothing to do with his wounds washed through Aragorn's body, followed by a sweep of weakness that had everything to do with them. The world gyrated again.

"Come along." Gandalf's gruff voice seemed to echo down a very long tunnel, and Aragorn was at first inclined to ignore it. "Aragorn, Son of Arathorn, get up." This time the words were accompanied by a compulsion that had Aragorn pushing himself upright. "That's better. I am an old man and would appreciate not having to carry you over my shoulder again, certainly not for the breadth of the valley."

The words made little sense to Aragorn's now addled wits, and he had not the strength to spare for their consideration. It took all of his energy to maintain his balance as he was half walked, half dragged down the trail. Thus they continued for what seemed to him a lifetime, each step more difficult than the last. Just as his strength finally gave out, Aragorn was swept into strong arms like a babe, and enfolded in a comforting scent from childhood memory.

"I have you, *tithen pen*."

Once more, Aragorn drifted up from darkness. Something familiar laid peace upon him, and for a while he was content to simply rest upon the cusp of full awakening. From a distance came the sound of rushing water, the rumble of a hundred waterfalls, and sweet birdsong. Warm sunlight caressed his face and he rested upon a yielding surface, with soft pillows beneath his head. Air tasted clean and wholesome, laden with the sharp tang of evergreens and something else. There it was again, that teasing scent that awakened memory, and it was that, accompanied by the soft whistle of silk garments, that opened his eyes at last.



Above was a ceiling of pale wood, its ribs elaborately carved with leaves and flowers. Rolling his head upon the pillow revealed long, thinly curtained windows, fine furniture and thick rugs. Finally, a dark outline leaned in, coalescing into the once familiar figure of Elrond of Rivendell.

"Good day, Estel."

Aragorn tried to lever himself upright and was enfolded in the familiar scent of sandalwood as his foster father rearranged pillows at his back. "Good day, Lord Elrond."

Elrond drew his chair closer, and settled long silk-lined robes about him as he sat once more.

"Lord Elrond, is it? You used to call me Adar. No matter. It is good to see you, although I would have preferred a less dramatic return."

Aragorn searched his foster father's face and tone for any sign of anger and, having found none, settled back among the down-filled cushions. "I am sorry to impose upon you." He noted, for the first time, the length of shadows on the floor and frowned. "How long have I been here?"

A twinkle of amusement touched Elrond's clear grey gaze. "Gandalf dragged you into my porch yesterday. You have slept the clock around and incidentally, you are not, nor have you ever been, an imposition. How do you feel now?"

Testing his arm, Aragorn found no sign of pain, only the gentle tug of stitches; additionally, his mind was no longer clouded with fever, although he felt as though the slightest breeze would blow him away. Even so, despite his foster father's assurance, it would not do to outstay his welcome. "I feel much better, thank you. With a little food, I am sure I can be on my way."

Elrond raised one elegantly winged brow. "Do you tire of my company already? If you do not wish a recurrence of your fever, I suggest you rest here for at least a week. That will also allow me to remove your dreadful needlework before you depart."

Now Aragorn could not resist a rueful smile. "I knew you would have something to say about those stitches. But I am right-handed, after all."

"Oh, it was not the quality of your needlework that disappointed me, but rather that you would have avoided a fever, had you taken time to cleanse the wound first. Could you find no athelas? I had to drain the injury and reset some of the stitches." Now concern clouded Elrond's smooth features. "Had Gandalf not intervened, you could have lost that arm, or died of blood poisoning. And he tells me you originally intended to avoid Rivendell and stagger all the way to Bree."

Five years fending for himself as an adult seemed to melt away, and Aragorn was a young boy once more, standing in his foster father's study. "I was unsure of my welcome."

Lord Elrond of Rivendell would never do anything so common as roll his eyes, but his tone conveyed the action perfectly. "Why ever would you think that?"

"Arwen."

"My daughter resides once more with her grandparents. Even did she not, you will always be welcome here, Estel."

The repeat of his childhood name brought a lump to his throat, and Aragorn had to swallow before replying, "Thank you, Adar."

Elrond sighed, shaking his head. "We parted in love, Estel, at least for my part. I will not have my daughter give away her immortality lightly, but that does not mean that I would not see you crowned king. Nor should you infer that I will not gladly assist you upon your path, even should fate join it with hers."

There was a soft knock at the door and a tall and slender elf entered, a covered tray in her hands. She smiled broadly. "Hello, Estel. I have brought you some food. Stitches and medicine are all very well, but a body needs food to repair itself."

Aragorn's eyes brightened as she placed the tray across his lap and lifted away the cover. "Hello, Faerwen. It is good to see you again. How is Erester?"

The lady shook out a napkin, laying it over his chest to protect the fine linen nightshirt he wore. "My husband is as difficult as ever, and still the love of my life." She turned her smile upon Elrond. "The twins are pacing the halls, awaiting news of their little brother."

When Aragorn opened his mouth to offer admittance, Elrond interjected, "They can visit tomorrow. For now, you may tell them that their brother is awake, and finally in his right mind."

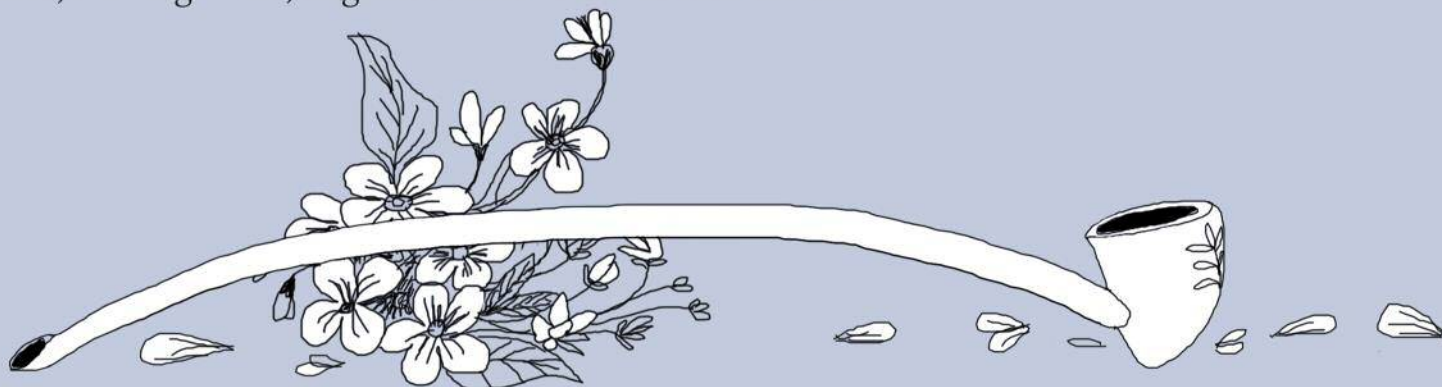
Faerwen laughed. "I shall." With those words she slipped from the room.

"You had best start eating, before that food cools," Elrond pointed out as he settled himself more comfortably. "Now, tell me of your journeys since you left us."

The next morning, Aragorn was strong enough to take a stroll. High walls ensured that roses still bloomed, even this late in the year, within one sheltered garden. Whilst there was no lock upon the gate, all knew that this was a space set aside for family and close friends, and Aragorn came here often in his youth. Now, as then, he made for a small arbour set against the southern wall and curtained by trailing ivy. He did not see the wizard until he stepped into the entrance. "Oh. My apologies. I did not realise that someone was already here."

"There is room for two. Or do you seek solitude?" Gandalf shuffled to one end of the small bench. Aragorn hesitated, then good manners got the better of him. After all, were it not for Gandalf's intervention, the next spring thaw would probably be revealing his desiccated corpse in a ditch. So he bowed before accepting a place at the old man's side. "Thank you."

Gandalf was smoking his long-stemmed pipe again, and for several minutes he simply sat in silence, blowing sweet, fragrant clouds of smoke into the air.



"Is that a Shire pipeweed?" Aragorn finally asked in an attempt at polite conversation. Gandalf studied the pipe for a moment, as though only now noticing its presence. "It is. It is called Old Toby, a particular favourite of a friend of ours."

"Ours?"

"You were but a lad when you met Bilbo Baggins."

"I remember. He was one of those you dragged off on your adventure." Aragorn smiled fondly.

"He helped me with a dancing lesson."

Gandalf chuckled again. "As I remember it, you were an ungainly thing at that age. All elbows and big feet."

"We only met for a few minutes, and you noticed all that?"

"You may have been concentrating upon your feet, but I was watching you and a wizard sees much."

"I always feel clumsy beside elves, although they are never rude enough to comment." Aragorn inhaled deeply, finding that the sweet smoke blended well with the perfume of late blooming flowers. "I have missed them."

"Elrond tells me that you and he had a long talk yesterday."

"Yes. I have been foolish, it seems."

His comment was met with a shrug of broad, grey-clad shoulders. "It is considered the prerogative of youth, although I would argue that it is not confined to any particular age."

"Even those as old as wizards?" Aragorn asked with a twitch of his lips.

"Especially those as old as wizards. Although a certain degree of eccentricity is expected of us, and makes a good blind for foolishness." He winked. "I would appreciate it if you kept that piece of information to yourself."

Aragorn laughed. "Your secret is safe with this fool."

There was another pause in the conversation as Aragorn studied a blackbird tugging determinedly at a worm. This time it was Gandalf who broke the silence. "Once you are fully recovered, what will be your direction?"

"It was the search for answers to that question which brought me to the garden today. Adar has made it clear that I am welcome to visit whenever I wish, but I know that I cannot remain here."

"I am certain that you would also be welcome in Lothlorien, if you wished to visit."

"I do not think that would be wise. Adar has not forbidden me to court Arwen, but the conditions he set are harsh. And perhaps rightly so. My people are dwindling and it is unlikely that we will ever be of sufficient numbers to challenge Sauron now. It is unlikely I shall be any kind of king. I would rather see Arwen living a long and happy life in the West."

"That is her decision to make. Not yours, and not her father's." Gandalf fitted on an innocent expression that did not fool Aragorn for one moment. "Will you set your sights upon another lady, then? After all, as chieftain, you have some obligation to produce an heir."

"I cannot even consider marrying another. I shall probably die in anonymity, and the mantle of chieftain will settle upon a cousin." At twenty-five, Aragorn lacked some of the moderation that came with age and experience, so his tone was mournful, to say the least.

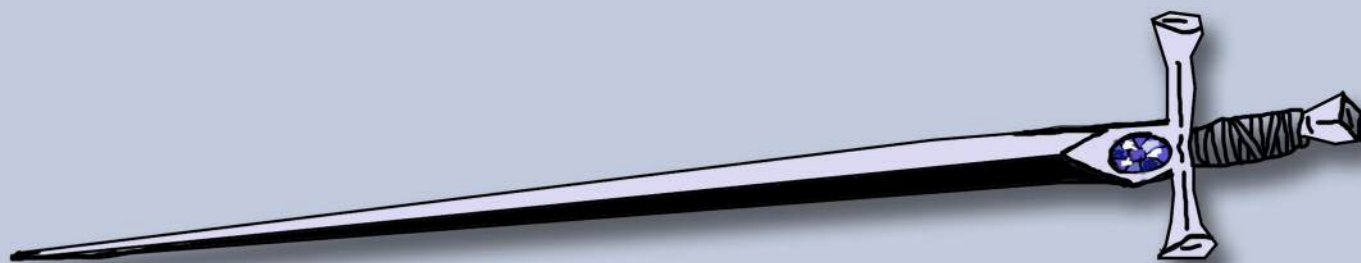
Gandalf coughed. "So you will walk the land, getting yourself attacked by orcs, until one day they finally succeed in killing you. That does not strike me as a particularly noble quest for the heir of Isildur."

"Then, what quest would you have me perform?" Aragorn asked, more than a little irked at what he perceived to be his elder's condescension.

"I would see a return of the High King and the reuniting of the two kingdoms," Gandalf replied, as though he were making the most obvious and reasonable of statements.

"A simple task, then. Would you like me to gather the twenty rings too? Just in the name of completeness, you understand."

Aragorn's words were peevish, to say the least, and it seemed Gandalf was having none of it. "Aragorn, Son of Arathorn, Heir to the thrones of Arnor and Gondor, would it not be better to aim for the heavens than the mud? If you do not succeed, you will at least have the honour of knowing that you tried. This..." Gandalf waved at the arm Aragorn wore in a sling. "This is not living. If you try and you succeed, you will have your lady and see your people living in peace and prosperity once more. That seems to me a worthy way to live. Certainly better than a boy skulking alone in the hedgerows."



Aragorn drew himself up to his full height. "I have already pointed out that my people are too few to come against Sauron. Would you have me lead them to certain death? That would surely be the action of a boy."

"Some spirit at last! But must your people go alone? It was alliance that brought the Dark Lord to heel before."

"It was not a final defeat, thanks to my own ancestor. And Adar has already made it clear that even the elves are not numerous enough now to be sure of victory, were they even willing to form alliance with men again. Those who have not already taken the road West are keenly aware that it was the actions of my ancestor, in not destroying the ring, that left us in this situation."

"You have lived among elves for too long, it seems. There are other peoples in Middle earth. I confess that you would find it a hard task to convince dwarves to join your quest. They erroneously consider themselves safe within their mountains. But there are men in large numbers to the south. The line of the Stewards is failing and the world of men looks for a strong leader who could reunite the two kingdoms."

Aragorn waved a hand down the considerable length of his body, presently clad in fine velvet and silk. "And they would accept a ragged stranger as their captain and king?"

Gandalf raised bushy brows, repacking his pipe as he spoke. "I very much doubt it, even dressed like that. Trust must be won, and you need to understand them, too. They have been so long without a High King that they look only inward nowadays. You must learn their ways if you are to convince them to turn outward once more."

"And how do you suggest I do that? I have had little success, thus far."

Once his pipe was lit, the old wizard leaned back comfortably. "You need not declare yourself openly. Elrond saw to it that you learned not just how to wield arms, but how to lead men. Put those skills to use. Perhaps hiring out as a man at arms will bring insight, and also make you some friends and future allies. The kings of Rohan are proud, but not so proud that they will turn away another strong sword arm. As for Gondor, Ecthelion is a good man but his line has not the strength it once wielded. He stands alone against Mordor in a war of attrition that he cannot win. With your training and a little experience, I am certain you could soon climb the ranks to become a captain of men." Gandalf paused before adding, "When you have learned all you can there, perhaps then you could even spare the time to revisit your own people."

Aragorn dropped his head. "I was rather quick to dismiss them, was I not?"

Gandalf's beard split with a grin. "Only a little. You will discover that life is not always as black or as white as it appears to the young. You have time enough to learn, that is if you do not decide to make any more foolhardy lone attacks upon orc packs."

Now Aragorn could not resist a little laughter. "It was not my intention to attack the last one. They attacked me. However, I do take your point. How do you suggest I avoid them in future?"

"Well, the trick is not so much how to avoid them, but rather how not to avoid meeting them alone. You have need of allies and, if you are willing, I have need of a good set of eyes in the court of Rohan."

And so it was that a young ranger, Thorongil by name, entered into the service of King Thengel of Rohan, and later to Ecthelion of Gondor.



sins of the eldar

or The Tragedy of Tolkien's Elves by Hikari-Katana

The children of J.R.R. Tolkien and Ilúvatar have a bit of a mixed reputation in fantasy. For some, elves cast in Tolkien's mold are the epitome of perfection among fantasy races. They are immortal, eternally young and beautiful, and their mastery of knowledge, music, and magic is unparalleled. Sometimes they are portrayed as pacifists, but other times they are unmatched, even bloodthirsty, warriors. Others take a dimmer view of these elves, seeing them as stuck up elitists and are envious of the popularity that elves enjoy compared to other fantasy races. Elves in this context are often mocked for being passive, cold, indifferent to the troubles of others, or stingy for not sharing their wealth of accomplishments. While these accusations are harsh, even those who revere elves can be a bit baffled by the air of melancholy that Tolkien bequeathed to them, especially when they have what appears to be the ultimate gift: immortality.

*But after reading **The Silmarillion**, I think that Tolkien's Elves are perhaps the most tragic characters in his books. **The Hobbit** and **The Lord of the Rings** are Tolkien's best-known stories and focus on the exploits of Hobbits, Men, and Dwarves, with the Elves only appearing along the periphery. But when you look at the linguistic origins of Middle-Earth, and **The Silmarillion** in particular, I think that Tolkien's body of work is essentially one long ongoing story of the Elves. And, thanks to the influence of Norse mythology and epic poems like **The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún**, that story tends to be a tragic one.*

Although Elves are a separate race of beings, they are in fact a lot more like humans than might be assumed at first glance. They are still affected by and indulge in what we would call very human emotions: greed and hate, lust and jealousy, pride, and fear. The Silmarillion shows not just how these emotions and subsequent reactions affected the Elves personally, but how they rippled down through families and across Middle-Earth, the repercussions shaping history in fundamental ways. And because the Elves are “old enough to know better,” these tragic events become that much more heart-breaking.

greed & hate;



*I remember being baffled by the obsession with treasure that led Thranduil, Elf-king of the Woodland Realm, to participate in the Battle of the Five Armies (see **The Hobbit**). Elves are usually portrayed as placing great value on beautiful objects, but more as an appreciation for the craftsmanship and meaning behind it, not the monetary worth the way humans or dwarves would see it. But after reading about how much bloodshed took place over three gemstones (regardless of how beautiful) it no longer seems un-elf-like to be so petty. Enter Fëanor, a great prince and leader of the Elves whose greed and hate cost them dearly.*

When the Elves lived in Valinor alongside the Valar (the “gods” of Middle-Earth), Fëanor created three beautiful gems and caught light from the two Holy Trees of Valinor within them. He called these gems “the Silmarils,” and over time became so covetous of them that they were kept hidden away under lock and key. When the Two Trees were destroyed by the machinations of the Enemy, the Valar asked Fëanor to give them the Silmarils to restore the Light, but he refused. The Enemy then killed Fëanor’s father and stole the Silmarils. In his rage against both the Enemy and the Valar, Fëanor and his seven sons swore a terrible oath to reclaim the Silmarils, no matter what, and led many of the Elves away from Valinor back to Middle-Earth. His hate and greed not only sundered the Elven peoples, but also led directly to the First Kinslaying. By shedding the blood of their fellow Elves, Fëanor brought down the Doom of Mandos, barring the Elves from ever returning to Valinor, though their spirits would find their way to his halls of the dead. The greatest craftsman of the Elves not only shaped their most beautiful treasures, but also crafted their greatest punishment (and as far as I can tell never repented of it). He was the spark for all of the following calamities that consumed Middle-Earth.



Lust & Jealousy:

Gondolin was a city of Elves and Men hidden from the forces of evil for centuries. It might have stood until Frodo's time if they hadn't been betrayed by one of their own. The king's nephew, an Elf named Maeglin, was born outside the city, but came there later with his mother. Once in Gondolin, Maeglin met and developed feelings for the king's daughter, Idril. But as since they were first cousins they could not wed, and Idril found Maeglin's interest disturbing. His love and affection turned into lust and jealousy, especially after Idril married the Man Tuor. Eventually Maeglin betrayed the location of Gondolin to the Enemy with the promise of receiving Idril as his prize. While Gondolin was destroyed and thousands of its people killed, Maeglin never received his reward. He attempted to kill Eärendil, the half-Elven son of Idril and Tuor, but Tuor stopped him and threw Maeglin over the ramparts to his death. Idril and Tuor escaped with Eärendil, who would later become the father of Elrond.

Pride:



*The other great bastion of the Elves in Middle-Earth was Doriath, long shielded from the Enemy by the magic of a Maia (or lesser Valar) named Melian. When a Man named Beren asked to marry Lúthien, the daughter of Melian and the elvish High King Thingol, Thingol did not want to part with her. So he asked Beren to retrieve a Silmaril from the Enemy as the price for his daughter's hand. (The epic poem **The Tale of Tinúviel** tells more of the story.) In short, Beren and Lúthien succeeded and brought back a Silmaril. Thingol decided to have the gem set in a special necklace made by the Dwarves, but apparently failed to account for the effect that the Silmaril would have on them. The Dwarves demanded the necklace (with the Silmaril) as payment for their work. In his pride, Thingol scorned their request and they killed him for it. With his death, Melian had no reason to remain in Middle-Earth and left for Valinor. Doriath was left open to attack by the Enemy and soon fell, further scattering the Elves.*

fear:

I think that, after the initial massive exile of the Elves thanks to Fëanor, this is the part that makes me the most sad. After centuries of fighting, only two of Fëanor's original seven sons remained alive: Maedhros and Maglor. During their lives, they'd done many good things to stave off the forces of the Enemy and protect Middle-Earth. But their oath to reclaim the Silmarils still drove them to commit atrocities and follies alike. Eventually they decided to try again to reclaim the Silmarils which were being held for safekeeping by the Maia Eönwë. Initially, they did ask for them, albeit in a very high-handed way, but Eönwë refused. He said that they would have to return to Valinor for judgment for the crimes of kinslaying, that there was still much blood on their hands for them to safely hold the Silmarils. Maglor urged his brother to beg pardon from the Valar, but Maedhros argued that there was no guarantee that such a pardon would be granted. The Oath of Fëanor bound them and if the Valar withheld mercy, then they would be doubly damned: once by being cast into the outer darkness by the Valar and a second time for not fulfilling their oath. Maglor consented and they managed to steal the Silmarils. However, they were still too tainted to hold the gems. Maedhros threw himself and the Silmaril into a fiery chasm and Maglor cast his into the sea, wandering alone along the shores after that, presumably unto his death. And what saddens me the most about this is that of all the sons of Fëanor, these two were the best and most honorable. I wonder what great things they could have accomplished if they had not been bound to such an oath, or if they'd found a way to circumvent it. The entire affair is just so sad... and wasteful.

As you can see from this list of sins, the Elves had an effect on Middle-Earth far greater than their numbers would suggest, and the ripples of those choices came back to haunt them even centuries later. Immortality is a double-edged sword, and a heavy one at that. It's a weight that Men, and even Dwarves, often find hard to comprehend, especially when so many of the players are merely names out of legend. Since many of the Elves mentioned so far are characters that few of us would be very familiar with, I want to present a personalized example of just how painful the weight of this history and the burden of all this bloodshed can be when one is immortal. I want to speak briefly of the history of Elrond.



pain:

In the film version of The Fellowship of the Ring, Elrond and Gandalf have a discussion in Rivendell about what to do to respond to the threat from Mordor. Gandalf suggests that Men will be the ones to help face this evil, but Elrond is skeptical. He says, "I was there, Gandalf. I was there three thousand years ago. I was there the day the strength of Men failed."

We then get a flashback to the battle at Mount Doom when Sauron was defeated but the One Ring was kept by the Man Isildur rather than destroyed. While interesting and informative, this doesn't give you the full weight of what three thousand years actually means. (And truth be told, Elrond is over six thousand years old when the events of The Lord of the Rings take place.) Elrond seems stiff and cautious, not to mention overprotective of his daughter Arwen, but after reading The Silmarillion you realize that he has very good reasons to be.

His parents guarded a Silmaril and, due to some very strange circumstances, they can never return to Middle-Earth. (His mother jumped into the sea and turned into a giant swan to escape with the jewel and keep it from falling into the wrong hands, and now his father carries it around the world in a flying boat as a new constellation. Talk about weird family histories...) During the Third Kinslaying, Elrond and his twin brother Elros were captured and subsequently adopted by one of those kinslayers, Maglor. (Yes, the same Maglor who stole a Silmaril and threw it into the sea.)

Since they are half-Elven on both sides of the family tree, Elrond and Elros were given the choice to either become human or remain elven. Elros chose to become a Man and the first king of Numenor, but Elrond remained an Elf. That meant he had to watch not only his brother eventually die of old age, but also see the decline of Elros's descendants into darkness as the Men of Numenor became corrupted and obsessed with gaining immortality for themselves. Eventually Numenor was destroyed, sent to the bottom of the sea by the Valar like the Elvish version of Atlantis. And Isildur, being one of the royal blood of Numenor, is technically a many-times-great-grandnephew of Elrond... and he ends up allowing the One Ring to survive to bring more strife to Middle-Earth.

In addition, about five hundred years before Frodo comes to Rivendell, Elrond's wife, Celebrian, daughter of Galadriel (yes, the Galadriel), was captured and tortured by orcs. While she was rescued by her sons, she could not be fully healed, soon leaving Middle-Earth for Valinor. And as if that wasn't enough, Elrond's daughter Arwen gives up her immortality to stay with Aragorn, High King of Gondor, and thus accepts the "gift" of Men (a.k.a. "death") which will sever her permanently from her family. In all likelihood, Elrond and Celebrian will never see their daughter again, even if Middle-Earth and Valinor survive this latest war with the Enemy. The Elves don't know where the souls of Men go, only that they do not enter the Halls of Mandos. To an immortal, "never" has a ring of finality that just cannot be comprehended by those doomed to die.



*All of this only touches the surface of **The Silmarillion**. There are folk with a much higher caliber of linguistic and scholarly capability who have plumbed those depths in far greater detail. But I hope this will encourage you to read **The Silmarillion** (and its companion, **The Unfinished Tales**) for yourself. It adds so many layers to the history and lore of Middle-Earth, strikes so many emotional chords, and each new excavation yields glittering gems more potent in their literary beauty than any Silmaril.*

sins of the eldar

The Tale of Sme'agol/Gollum, Bilbo, and the Ring of Power

By Donna Ferguson Dudley

Years, nay, centuries had passed since on a fishing expedition
Sme'agol's friend, De'agol, the One Ring of Power chanced to find.
In greed, Sme'agol then killed his friend and stole the ring, without Contrition;
That innate greed had surely drawn the Ring's own evil to his mind!

Fast driven from community of other Hobbits, he had gone
to dwell in dark 'neath Misty Mountain, devouring fish, strange lonely creature!
The Ring of Power had worked its way until his mind was not his own,
And as the decades passed away, the evil changed his handsome features.

A wizened, loathsome thing was Gollum, but with large Hobbit's eyes,
alone to show what he had been before the Ring had made its claim;
Bright blue they shone from out a visage evil had quite compromised
From time so long ago, now passed, when he had claimed "Sme'agol" as name.

His thoughts were ever for that Ring; "Precious", the one thing he loved only.
Yet, tough he must have been, in truth, to survive those passing centuries all!
To live so long 'neath Evil's sway in darkness, there alone, so lonely
Until the day the Ring into the Hobbit Bilbo's hands did fall!

Crazed, Gollum searched for Bilbo, murderous and anxious to destroy!
But Bilbo used his cunning, though the Ring did try to claim him;
It tried to turn his mind, but Goodness shone within that Hobbit boy
And his heart took pity on Gollum, the difference between them!

Though Gollum would have gladly killed and eaten him up for a meal,
Bilbo chose compassion's path and cannily just slipped away;
That choice, mostly, freed Bilbo from the Ring, of Power's evil will
While Gollum raged, but lived to try again some other day!

Manwaelmelwe: protector of Rivendell's earth

By Caitey M Gehan

Manwaelmelwe awoke from the fear of the boulder coming closer. Every time she fell asleep, it seemed the boulder was closer to crushing her! Manwaelmelwe (known fondly as Manwae by her friends) could never seem to come to peace with the events of that fateful day when the large boulder killed Skogrim the dwarf in front of her eyes. Back then, she was just a mere apprentice and had not yet become acquainted with war. Though Skogrim posed a threat to the elves of Rivendell, his death could never be forgotten.

Since she was now awake, Manwae decided to check with the guard, Ando, to see if any new information about her sister had arrived. The reason Manwae could never forget the war was because her twin sister, Menuaindo, had been separated from her during the skirmish. They had been together all their lives. After killing a bear at the tender age of eight, the two had even trained as huntresses together. Once the dust had cleared from the boulder that ended the enemy of the elves, Menuaindo was nowhere to be found. However, Ando would be given news of any events no matter the size, even from as far away as Hobbiton.

The elf with the sharp ears had heard of some of the accomplishments of Menuaindo, but she would vanish from the area by the time someone arrived to the location of the deed. Her training in the art of hunting had taught Menuaindo to be swift and to never waste time, lest the prey run away. However, sometimes horses cannot be found and one must travel on foot to the next location, or a storm could cause one to spend the night in a town instead of traveling. Manwae never gave up hope that these circumstances would slow her sister down enough to find her. Perhaps Ando would have some good news today!

"Aya, Ando! A star shines bright upon our meeting! Any news of my swift sister?"

"May Govannen, Manwae! Your sister has slipped from my ears; I have not heard of her today."

Disappointed, Manwae walked back to Elrond's house. The lady Arwen would soon awaken from her slumber, and it would be proper to accompany her for breakfast.

Manwae had been at a loss of what to do after her teacher died, so since she showed much potential, Elrond had decided to make Manwae the lady-in-waiting of Lady Arwen so Lady Arwen would not be so lonely in her house. After all, the love of her life had recently left Rivendell, and she needed a friend. By the time Manwae arrived at the grand hall for breakfast, Lady Arwen had just started to eat.

“May Govannen, Manwae! Have you heard any news of your sister, my friend?”

“Well met, Lady Arwen. Unfortunately, no news has come today. Perhaps tomorrow will bring better news.”

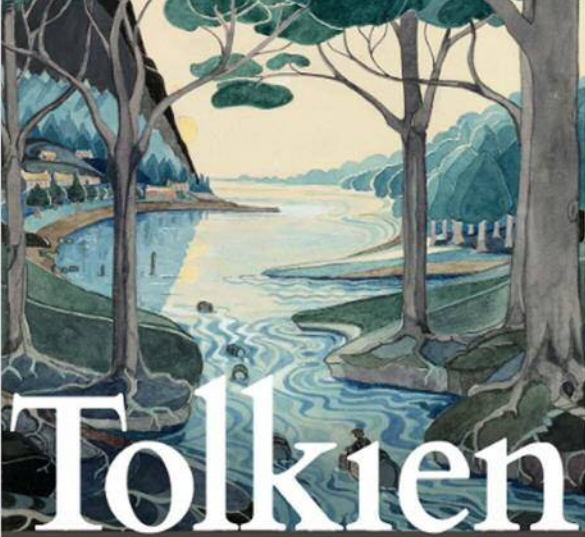
After finishing breakfast, the two friends decided to walk amid the forest. All of a sudden, a giant boar blocked their path. Manwae yelled at the beast, trying to convince it to move. Alas, this only made the beast angry and charge towards the young ladies! Manwae glanced back at Lady Arwen and saw the look of fear and defeat in her piercing eyes. Seconds separated the Lady Arwen from her fate. If Manwae did not act in time, the immortality of elves would be put to the test. Manwae pulled an arrow from behind her, placed the arrow in position, took a deep, determined breath, and brought flight to the arrow. The boar fell inches from Lady Arwen, its heart slowly oozing its life force.

Arwen was in shock; she had heard the legends of both Manwae and the legends of the boar. Many had lost their lives to the tusked beast without it ever meeting defeat or capture. “Well,” she thought, “it is fitting that it was a legend that killed the legend.” After seeing the skills that Manwae possessed, Arwen knew that keeping her in Rivendell as the whole of Middle Earth suffered was unfit.



“Manwae, the skill you have with the bow should not be wasted on formal dinners. You must help those that are not strong in our world. Tomorrow, I will give you my horse. You must ride to Celondim and see if any help is needed. Perhaps on your adventures, you will find your sister.”

Manwae was shocked by this statement. She had never been outside the borders of Rivendell, but she had heard about the monsters that lived outside her home. There were even rumors that someone was organizing an army of orcs, and some areas had Trolls and Barrowwights! Even if she did manage to defeat some of these monsters, Manwae had heard that many weak people lived in Middle Earth. She would never have time to find her sister if she was to help as many as she could! However, she respected Lady Arwen and knew that she was in the right, so she agreed to make the journey. So begins the adventures of Manwaemelwe, and there are many!



MAKER OF MIDDLE-EARTH

an exhibition review by

Martina Juričková

Constantine the Philosopher
University in Nitra

Once-in-a-generation.

Such is the epithet Bodleian Libraries in Oxford use to describe their current exhibition, running from 1 June until 28 October 2018 (after which it moves to New York to be open between 25 January and 12 May 2019), which features materials not only from their own Tolkien Archive, but also from the Tolkien Collection of Marquette University in the USA, and from the private collections of his descendants. Its advertised uniqueness consists in the show of some of the fantasy author's writings as well as paintings (which are the main lure of the exhibition!) that have never before been published. So, upon its announcement, I, like many other Tolkien fans and people academically interested in his work from all over the world, was strongly tempted to go, even though the distance was dissuading. But who knows when such an opportunity may come again?

The Tolkien Society announced on their website that the last time all these materials were brought together was during Tolkien's lifetime, and he has inhabited the Halls of Mandos for 45 years already. So, if the next similar chance did not come for the same number of years, I might not even live to see it. That settled it. I just could not have missed out on this one.

Now, after having seen it, I definitely don't regret travelling half way across Europe. It surpassed all my expectations.

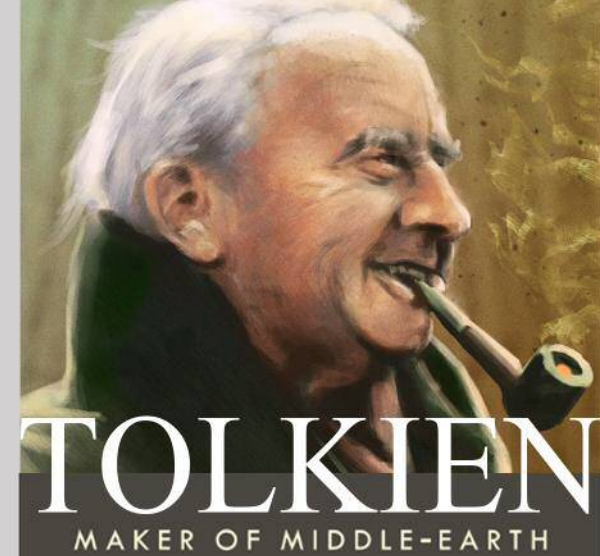
Surprisingly, the rather small ST Lee Gallery in Weston Library was able to hold over 200 items that once belonged to, or were created by, the Oxford don. So, it is nothing unusual for his devoted fans and thorough visitors to take about two hours to inspect them all. But if, like me, you are a tourist with a 6kg pack on your back, coming here before checking in at your accommodation, then shuffling in front of the showcases, reading the exhibited items' descriptions, or deciphering Tolkien's handwriting can be really tough on your legs and spine. Probably, the only negative of the exhibition was that there were too few resting places for the number of visitors. Since the ticket authorizes you to only one entry, you can't slip off for a little break and refreshment at the library café and then return and take up your viewing at the point which you left it. So, Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth could have benefitted from a bigger space with more than one bench to sit on to ease your tired legs, and immerse yourself in a relaxed, if a bit distanced admiration of the exhibit.

Even this does not deter fans from distant countries from coming, however. Listening to the visiting crowd, one can identify languages from all the parts of the world that have been reached by Tolkien's fame: Germanic, Romanian, Slavic, but also more exotic Asian and African dialects. Likely from as many countries as there have been translations of his books, as exemplified in two full showcases at the gallery. I was even able to spot the Slovak version of *The Hobbit* among them. The worldwide impact of his writing, is evidenced also by the section of yet-unpublished fan letters and the writer's answers to them, including mail from some prominent persons and fellow writers, such as Terry Pratchett.



TOLKIEN

MAKER OF MIDDLE-EARTH



This exhibition appeals to everyone across all ages: from pre-school children, who enjoy the interactive maps and quizzes, to aged scholars; and across fandom levels: from those who knew nearly nothing about Tolkien prior to coming here as mere escort (As was the case with my colleague), through Jackson's-films-first fans, and ripe Tolkienologists.

For the Tolkien-lore newbies of the first two groups, the exhibition represents a compact, yet complex, overview of his private and academic life, from his not-so-happy parentless childhood and youth, to his at-first-forbidden but eventually fairy-tale-like-ended love to Edith Bratt. Through both World Wars' years, academic career, and friendship with C. S. Lewis, up to his unexpected success as a fantasy writer. During those two hours, newbies can learn so much information, which they would otherwise have had to read through several biographical and critical works in order to discover.

The displayed manuscripts reveal his process of writing and seemingly never-ending editing, giving the visitors an opportunity to see the development of chosen passages of his major works – *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion* – at different writing stages, and to compare the changes in plot, character naming and their racial identity. The spirit of the writer, as well as his age, is made present via his personal belongings, such as his writing desk, chair, painting tools, books, hat, or pipe, arranged in such a way that it seems as if he left the place just a moment before.

His army paraphernalia and photos from King Edward's School album, which highlights Tolkien's schoolmates who died in WWI, make the visitors view his work in a wider social context, and allows them to marvel at how one man, such as he, was able to manage this all in his lifetime, especially considering the struggles he went through.

A partial answer to this question is his multi-talented nature. Materials documenting the development of his three major books make up hardly a quarter of the exhibition's content. The rest is occupied by papers that can appeal to the advanced fans who already knew the writer's life well. Here, belong his Middle-earth map drafts (complemented with two illustrated maps by Pauline Baynes), linguistic notes, or excerpts from the poetical versions of some of his greatest legendarium stories, such as the lay of Eärendil or Túrin Turambar, which in their earliest forms amounted to over 2000 lines. These are unfinished, and therefore have never been published, except in prosaic rewriting.

In addition, language-keen visitors can learn the basics of Elvish, listen to Tolkien's recording of his own reciting of a number of Elvish poems, or test their knowledge at a special stand with headphones.

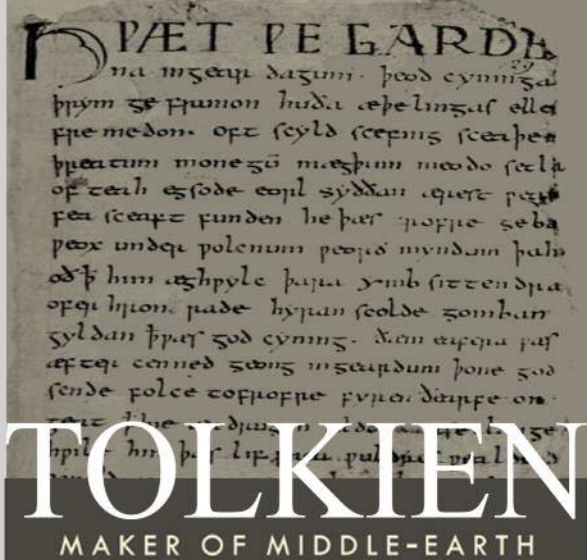


Despite the title, the exhibition is not centred solely on Tolkien's Middle-earth stories. There is also a section dedicated to his other tales, such as **Father Christmas Letters, Mr. Bliss, Roverandom, Farmer Giles of Ham,** and more; which may be new information to some of the lore newbies. Excerpts from these books, together with a number of family photographs, emphasize the writer's strong orientation to family and love for his children.

Nonetheless, the biggest attraction, besides the interactive 3D map of Middle-earth, designed by artistic studio Factum Arte from Madrid, which occupies a place at the heart of the gallery, are Tolkien's paintings. Some may know that the first editions of *The Hobbit* included Tolkien's own illustrations, either coloured or not. But many even advanced fans, may be surprised to find out that painting various scenes and locations from his stories was a regular part of his writing process, and were not made just at the publisher's demand. In fact, there exist many more of Tolkien's paintings than ever made it into his books in print; and some of those are displayed here for the first time. Actually, this exhibition section provides the greatest selection of yet-unpublished works, including Tolkien's newspaper doodles, that grew into intricate Elvish designs, or pieces from the draft-book from his teenage years, *The Book of Ishness*. These pieces attack your visual perception with fantastical, otherworldly concepts and colour combinations, leaving viewers simply overwhelmed.

The exhibition is accompanied by a massive shop event, where you can buy various items with prints of Tolkien's paintings, from pens and magnets through cups and up to posters and a book of the same name as the exhibition, which includes 6 essays by prominent Tolkien scholars and more than 300 pictures of his manuscripts, letters, and paintings in high quality, the exhibited items among them.

In summary, Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth, is an exhibition that, on the space of several square meters and in a very home-like and peaceful atmosphere, complemented by the projection on parts of Tolkien's painting and quotes above the show-cases, provides a complex overview of the writer's life and work, and which nobody leaves unawed. For the fans it is a must-see, for such an opportunity comes only once in a generation, and even non-fans can gain a new perspective on him. So, I strongly recommend it to everyone.



The exhibit "Tolkien, Maker of Middle-Earth" is currently on display at The Morgan Library and Museum in New York City, where it will be open to the public until May 12, 2019

Thorongil

By Christopher Woods



Dilian often wondered where Gondor would be without Thorongil. He had come in the very nick of time, as it were, just when men like him were most needed. Indeed, there were some who thought that if Ecthelion had not had a son, the people might have taken him and made him king. They had been so long without one that the very idea of a king was practically a myth, something that was learned in the nursery and hardly ever mentioned again. But if there ever truly had been kings, they would have been like Thorongil: strong to fight but eager to make peace, with wisdom, sorrow, and joy all mixed in his eyes. Gondor loved him and cherished him as one of her own, even if no one knew where this wandering warrior had come from.

Ecthelion knew that Mordor would strike Gondor first and hardest because of their ancient enmity. So he gathered to Gondor the brave and the heroes, sending word throughout all of Middle-Earth that Gondor was in need. They had come from all over, bearing all manner of weapons. Some were turned away at once, being only frauds who hoped to gain loot and pleasure from the White City, though there was very little of those left; others were accepted, and were at once set to work defending Ithilien and the coastlands from Mordor and the rebels. Constantly, word would come to the White City of the battles of the previous day and whether it was yet time to retreat into the mountains. Frequently, small bands would come back, and people would rush out of the City and take the wounded to the Houses of Healing, where they would stay for a few weeks and then return to battle. Gondor was caught in constant war, and in such a time Thorongil was a gift out of the West.

Dilian marveled at the endurance of the man, if man he was. Many said that they felt an elven air about him, even though few in Gondor had seen an elf. More compared him to the people of Dol Amroth, whose blood was much closer to the Numenoreans of old, and thus also to the Elves. Dilian was once eating with his friends when one of them brought this up.

“Perhaps the people of the Golden Wood are coming to help us in these dark days!”

“Taldon!” said another. “The times are bad enough without *them* coming here. Everyone knows that the Golden Wood is full of danger, and the Lady Galadriel a terrible sorceress.”

“Not Thorongil, Nemnor,” Dilian said.

Nemnor started. “Since when did you know Thorongil on such a personal level?” he asked.

Dilian leaned back with his mug of beer and a faraway look in his eye. “I was walking down from the Houses of Healing after visiting Galhon when I heard a song, floating, floating in the breeze. I stopped and listened. Who wouldn’t? It was entrancing, ensnaring, pulling me in. I looked around and saw Thorongil in the gardens, sitting on a bench overhung with ivy, and singing to himself. I stood still, hardly daring to disturb the beauty of the music. Gracefully, slowly, the song ended, and Thorongil looked up and smiled at me. ‘Do you like it?’ he asked. ‘Like it?’ I answered. ‘I’ve never heard anything close to it! What is it?’ He hesitated, and I thought he wouldn’t answer. But finally, just when I had made up my mind to leave, he said, ‘It is a song from the Golden Wood.’ I must admit, Nemnor, that when I heard this, my reaction was the same as yours, and disgust was the first thing that came to my mind. ‘The Golden Wood?’ I managed at last. ‘Don’t tell me you’ve been there!’ He smiled again, and I could tell he was not here, but somewhere completely other. ‘I’ve been there only once, but my heart has never left. The Golden Wood is the most beautiful place in all of Middle-Earth, and let none tell you otherwise.’ I wondered at this, and told him that he must have been caught in the Lady’s snares himself, but at once regretted it. His eyes, just recently so full of joy, turned at once to raging fire, and at that moment I felt sorry for all his enemies, even the Orcs. But just as quickly, he was filled with great sadness, and the fire died. ‘If we had time, I would take you there and show you the truth. But there is no time for such things in war.’ I could tell that he earnestly believed what he was saying, and was under no spell of any kind. So I said, ‘My name is Dilian, sir, and I promise you that if I survive to see a more peaceful time, I will visit the Golden Wood.’ He replied, ‘Tell the Lady that Thorongil sent you, and you will be well treated.’ I told him I would and continued on my way, amazed at what had occurred.” Dilian fell silent, and absentmindedly sipped his beer.

Taldon looked delighted. “That was one of the most beautiful stories I’ve ever heard,” he murmured.

“And that’s all it was,” said Nemnor, “A story. You were probably dreaming, Dilian. Think no more of it.”

And now Dilian was thinking about that chance meeting again, as he stood on the wall, looking east. He had found himself here more often of late. Most people in the city would never want to look east, avoiding it as often as possible. But Dilian knew that even if people wanted to avoid it, they couldn’t do so anymore. And Dilian found this place on the wall, the third in, perfect for thinking. The first thought that came to his mind was what Middle-Earth would be like if Gondor fell. Music was first thing he knew would be



lost, the beautiful music that Thorongil had been singing. Not just that song, but all songs like it; not just the songs that were beautifully sad, but the jolly songs, the drinking songs—all songs. Perhaps the best way of defying Mordor was to sing. And this song would also give him something to fight for.

“Do you know anything of sailing?”

Dilian suddenly turned to find Thorongil standing behind him. He seemed more ordinary now that he was talking to him personally, but Dilian still felt awe for the mighty warrior. But he drew himself up with pride and answered the question. “I was born on the banks of the Anduin, near Pelargir,” he said. “I practically spent my whole life on the river, until I came here.”

Thorongil nodded. “Good. I will need you to be ready to travel to Pelargir in the morning.”

Without waiting for an answer, he left Dilian on the wall and hurried back down to the streets. Dilian hurried down the other way, to the barracks he was staying in. Hardly pausing to nod at Nemnor and Taldon, he burst into his room and began polishing his armor. Taldon came in the open door with a slip of paper in his hand.

“Dilian,” he said, handing the paper over, “Some man gave this to me, told me to give it you as soon as

possible.”

Dilian took the paper and read it: *We travel light*. “Well, then,” he said, “I won’t need this.” Tossing away the breastplate he was working on, he began sharpening his sword.

“What’s all the excitement?” Nemnor came in behind Taldon.

“I’ve been recruited on a special mission by Thorongil himself, something to do with sailing, don’t ask me what.” Dilian continued sharpening his sword, not even looking up at Nemnor for a second.

“You’re not the only one,” Nemnor said. “There are quite a few others who have said the same. People from the coastlands, mainly. I wonder what’s going on.”

“All I can say is, it’s unlikely you’ll find out any time soon. Now, I would like to be alone.”

Nemnor and Taldon left, and Dilian paused for a moment. He had no idea when he would learn the purpose of this sudden mission. But he could guess, and he guessed it had something to do with the Corsairs. They had been growing bolder lately, and were ravaging whatever coastland villages were insufficiently defended. Were they planning an attack on Pelargir, and now they were being sent to help defend it? But why did he ask if Dilian knew how to sail? Surely Gondor wasn’t assembling a fleet of its own to challenge the Corsairs! That would be ridiculous! Yes, it would help, but only for a little while, before the Corsairs came down on the tiny fleet in full force. But maybe, if a man such as Thorongil commanded it... No, not even Thorongil could do such wonders. He may be a fine warrior, but there were things even beyond a fine warrior. Things that were utterly impossible.

Dilian arrived at the Great Gate to find a small troop of horsemen waiting, Thorongil at its head. “Here I am, sir,” Dilian said. “I take it we are riding to Pelargir?”

“Quite so,” Thorongil answered. “Your horse is over there. We have no time to waste.”

“Yes, sir.” Dilian looked over at the horse Thorongil had pointed out. It looked terribly large, and Dilian was amazed that all the other men around him managed to stay on their horses; he was amazed that they had gotten on their horses in the first place! But he had his orders. Resolutely, he marched up to the horse and tried to pull himself onto the horse as one would pull oneself over a cliff-edge. One of the other horsemen burst out laughing.

“Here,” said a jolly voice behind Dilian. “Let me help you. I’ll hold my hands together, and you step on that so you can swing a leg over the saddle.”

Dilian turned to see a tall man dismount and come over to him. He looked as though he was from Dol Amroth – a bright voice and sea-grey eyes. “Thank you,” Dilian said. “I’m afraid I haven’t really spent much time around horses. Thorongil was looking for sailors.”

“Yes, but in my opinion far too few people of this city spend time around horses. We should learn a lesson from our friends to the North: namely, that these are noble beasts. Anyway, here you are.” The friendly stranger knelt down in the street and held his cupped hands for Dilian. “Just step right here, and once you get in the saddle, put your feet in the stirrups there.” Dilian hesitated for a moment. “Hurry up now, it looks like almost everyone’s here.”

Dilian glanced quickly around to make sure no one was looking, and hoisted himself up. It was still a bit of a struggle, but definitely more successful this time.

“Thank you,” Dilian started, then paused.

“Lothdan,” said the stranger, “Lothdan is my name.”

“Thank you, Lothdan. I am Dilian.”

“Very glad to meet you, and I dearly hope you don’t die on this little trip.” Lothdan treated the subject with what Dilian thought was undue levity.

“I was rather hoping that myself,” Dilian said grimly.

“By the way, any idea why we’re going to Pelargir? I thought the Enemy was all set on taking Osgiliath.”

“I haven’t the faintest,” Dilian said, still not entirely recovered from his humiliating experience.

“Well, I guess we’ll find out soon enough. It looks like Thorongil is about to say something.”

Dilian glanced up and saw Thorongil turn his horse around. He wondered if he would be capable of doing that, and leaned over to Lothdan. “How do you make this thing move?” he said.

“Nudge its sides with your heels. Nudge harder if you want to go faster.”

“I think just a little nudge will be fine, thanks.”

“And her name is Vaile, for future reference.”

“Thank you.”

“And if you want to turn, pull on the reins here in the direction you want to go.”

“Thank you.”

While this hurried conversation was still going on, Thorongil had given the order to move, and Dilian was able to put his lesson to use right away. Lothdan kindly stayed close, always eager to help, but his presence and his constant happiness annoyed Dilian. He wanted the stranger to leave him alone, but he knew that that was synonymous to leaving him behind. In the end, he had no choice but to put up with the cheerful man of Dol Amroth.

The ride to Pelargir was quite uneventful in itself. Dilian soon found himself

pointing out certain places to Lothdan, and enjoying the man's company more than he expected. It was almost as though Lothdan's constant jollity was infectious, and Dilian had caught it. Riding was not as bad as Dilian had expected, and he managed to stay with the company. And yet, Dilian feared that they would find Pelargir under siege from the sea. He was relieved to find it was not.

Thorongil allowed a short rest in Pelargir, then ordered the small company he brought from Minas Tirith to commandeer a few small sailing vessels the next day. Several other ships had likewise been crewed by companies from various other cities in Gondor, and it seemed that Thorongil was in charge of the whole fleet. When the fleet was ready, Thorongil stood up in his flagship, from which flew the banner of the Stewards, and addressed the crews.

“Soldiers of Gondor! I have gathered you here to make an attack on the Corsairs. They think that they control the entire ocean, but we still have ships and courage, and that is all we need. We will sail to their haven in Umbar, and we will set fire to their ships, that they will no longer harass our people like this! The wind is fair; let us depart!”

Dilian joined the fleet in a hearty cheer, then unfurled the sails to catch the eastern wind. As the fleet slid down the Anduin toward the sea, Dilian looked around and counted the ships – twenty, maybe a few more. None of them were larger than fifteen meters. Was Thorongil insane? How had Ecthelion allowed this suicide mission? But they were on the move now, and all Dilian could do was hope that this was well thought out.

The tiny fleet was engulfed in darkness when Dilian saw firelight glimmer on the horizon. A command was whispered into the night, and the oars were muffled. In the gloom, Dilian could barely see archers wrap rags around their arrow-tips and soak them in oil. Battle was about to be joined.

Dilian waited, crouched low in the ship. Ever so carefully, he dipped his oar in and out of the water, silently, softly, slowly. He wanted to loosen his sword, but knew he must keep the rhythm of the oars. He couldn't tell if the fires were getting any closer. He had to trust in the judgement of Thorongil.

A shout rudely broke the dark silence, causing Dilian to jump and inadvertently splash his oar. Light shone from a hundred fires as the archers drew their bows and fired at the enemy. The sudden flares lit the dreamlike scene, and Dilian saw ships—mountains, rather!—surrounding him on all sides, and peering down at him were dark faces, whose expressions couldn't be seen against the sky. Dilian's boat bumped against the larger Corsair ship, and he jumped up and grabbed a rope hanging over the side, desperately hoping that the southerners wouldn't see him and cut the rope. He pulled himself over the rail, and found a hundred men rushing at him from all sides. Dilian froze.

“Túré! Túré! Arwen ta túré!”

“The Swan and Dol Amroth!”



Dilian saw Lothdan dash past him and hurl himself into the enemies, as farther down along the vast deck, Thorongil did the same. All hesitancy was lost, and Dilian joined the battle as the scant Gondorian force swarmed the stronger Corsair fleet. He crossed swords with one pirate, the straight weapon of Pelargir crashing against the bent steel of the south. Looking into the Corsair's eyes, he saw a mixture of surprise, hatred and fear. But there was no time to think of it, no time at all. Dilian turned his sword quickly and slashed; the pirate cried out and staggered back, falling on the deck. Dilian leaped forward, parrying and thrusting, felling one pirate after another. Always in his mind, he saw his home on the banks of the Anduin, and promised himself that he would never let these pirates see that land.

Not far, he saw Thorongil jump forward with a torch in his hand, and throw it down into a hatch. Immediately, fire blossomed from the heart of the ship, and the sudden light made Dilian blink as he fought to see. A figure rushed at Thorongil, and Dilian saw the two shapes struggle in front of the blaze. Thorongil pushed the pirate back and drew his sword, getting ready for another attack. Without wasting any time, the pirate captain surged up again, only to find that Thorongil was thoroughly prepared. A proper duel began, and the pirate was forced back against the railing of the deck. He became desperate, and it looked for a moment as though Thorongil might be pushed back from his advantage. Dilian rushed forward, wanting to help. The swords of the combatants locked. Thrusting his sword into a pirate who had stepped in his way, Dilian charged. Thorongil bashed his head against the pirate captain, who tumbled over the rail and into the sea. Dilian stopped himself. Around them, the whole Corsair fleet was burning, while Umbar began to rally itself together for a counter-attack.

“Back to the ships! Fall back!”

Dilian and Thorongil ran to the opposite side of the deck, avoiding leaping flames, falling timbers, and wild pirates. All around them, others of the Gondorian raiding party also lowered themselves over the sides and into their own ships. Dilian seized his oar, and the small fleet sailed back north, having defeated their larger adversary. The southern threat was eliminated, for a time.

Nemnor entered Dilian’s room to find his friend packing again. It had only been a few days since the raid, but Dilian was already preparing for another adventure.

“Leaving again?”

“Yes. I have leave for a few weeks, and I plan to use them as advised by a friend.” Dilian hoisted his pack. “Goodbye, Nemnor. I’m not sure if I’ll return, but if I do, I will be a better man for this journey.”

Nemnor was too stunned to say anything, simply stepped aside to let Dilian pass.

At the Great Gate, Dilian found Taldon waiting with a pack of his own. They greeted each other, left the White City, and turned north to the Golden Wood.



Reflections on The Lord of the Rings 18 Years Later...

By Isabella Summit



I only watched the Ralph Bakshi cartoon and the Rankin Bass ROTK and *The Hobbit* when I was a kid. I knew nothing about Tolkien in 2001; I was 8 years old. *The Mummy Returns* had just come out, the sequel to my favorite childhood movie, so I had my dreams fulfilled already. Dad had watched a trailer on his computer over and over for a movie that had three release dates, each around Christmas. Suddenly Mom and Dad wanted really bad to go to the movies. They had to get my brother off his Super Nintendo to head out in the middle of the night. It was freezing cold and the smallish theater was crammed with people. We had to wait in a long, sluggish line just to get some popcorn.

When the movie started, I got confused fast; I didn't know who this old wizard was or why everyone cared about him. There were two guys with long hair and beards who I thought were the same. Dad seemed to be excited about the evil wizard with long white hair and a scary voice. I only asked one thing when it was over: **WHY DID IT HAVE TO END THERE!** We all groaned when the two hobbits went over the horizon after so much had happened, and we didn't want it to end. We watched it a ton of more times in the theater after that, each time bringing different friends along.

During the next year, we got a bunch of burger king goblets and action figures. I still hadn't read any of the books. Mom had this huge poster at home that was a map of the world in the movies. We ate at Skippers just before going to

see the next one, a year later. It opened on a Friday, so we all ate fish while Dad tried to tell me what to expect. All I remember about seeing the second movie for the first time is really hating the long-haired guy who kidnaps the hobbits. Each of these movies was so long that I had to space out when I went to the bathroom each time, so I didn't miss anything. This time we saw it in the new theater which had moved behind Applebee's. We always made it a point to eat there before the movie. The food was better then.

Coming up on the third film, I actually started reading the third book. I found the books hard to read, with character names I couldn't pronounce. Then I remember having an afternoon swimming class after which Dad told me to dry off quickly and get ready to go to the theater. I cried multiple times during that movie, mostly when the character I had previously hated charges to his death. I cried so much that a woman in the seat next to me had to comfort me. I felt so sorry for him, being so obedient that he was willing to go on a hopeless mission simply because he was ordered. From then on, he became my favorite character. My first attempts at writing were fanfiction about him. We watched the third movie so many times I can't remember.

That was my humble introduction to the fantasy universe of J. R. R. Tolkien. I'm one of those babies who watched the films first. Luckily my mom taught a whole lecture class on his books at church. This helped me better understand the characters and the story when I read the books for myself. To this day, my dad still watches scenes from the movies which always move him to tears. My brother played the amazing tie-in video games nonstop. *The Lord of the Rings* is a part of my family and my memories.

There is something just so original about *The Lord of the Rings*. It provided the template for all fantasy films and books afterwards. Orcs are now featured in many other fantasy series and *The Lord of the Rings* completely changed our cultural perception of elves from the workers in Santa's workshop. Nowadays, no fantasy epic movies can be released without being compared to *The Lord of the Rings*, at least visually.

More than that, you have to give J. R. R. credit for making his own expanded universe during his lifetime. He created a new language and names in that language and then wrote a story around it. He is the father of modern fantasy. Everything he wrote was original and only inspired by real world Norse mythology. But what deepens it is that he used his Catholic faith to turn it into an allegory for ideas that make it a stronger and more faceted story than any other fantasy since then.

I just hope that enough people will be curious enough from the memes and movies to go back and appreciate the novels.



STRENGTH

By Danika Cooper

*Where now the horse and the rider? Where is the horn that was blowing?
Where is the helm and the hauberk, and the bright hair flowing?
Where is the hand on the harp-string, and the red fire glowing?
Where is the spring and the harvest and the tall corn growing?
They have passed like rain on the mountain, like a wind in the meadow;
The days have gone down in the West behind the hills into shadow.
Who shall gather the smoke of the dead wood burning?
Or behold the flowing years from the Sea returning?*

~

The world had slipped into twilight – that queer middle plane between daylight and darkness that renders both eyesight and torchlight utterly useless. Straining his own eyes, Theoden gave his steady and surefooted mare a slack rein, and the faithful creature picked her way through the rocky hills with the patience of a mule. He rubbed his hands together briskly before cupping them to his mouth once more to call out; the air was growing cooler as dusk fell.

“Eowyn!”

His shout was swallowed up in the descending darkness. He did not trouble to stop the mare while he fished flint, tinder and a torch out of a saddlebag. In the distance, he could hear other men calling, could see other torches being lit. They had been searching for hours. No one knew when or where the child had gone; the wan wisp of a girl had been disconsolate and solitary since the death of her mother – rest her soul – and so no one had missed her until evening. Theodwyn had been a tender-hearted soul, Theoden reflected, and she would have been hysterical over the child’s long absence.

Cursing suddenly, he put his thumb in his mouth; he had cut it on the sharp flint. His sparks weren’t catching on the pine-tar. He cupped his hand around the head of the torch and blew gently to coax it to life and flame.

The mare stopped and gave a soft nicker. Theoden turned towards the sound of a friendly answering whinny and raised the torch. A plump gray pony was meandering across the next hillock, nibbling its way between clusters of bitter simbelmyne in search of tender grass. Theoden gave a sigh of relief at the sight of his niece sitting in the grass, her skirts hiked up above her knees, plucking the petals from a fistful of snowy flowers and crushing them into the earth at her feet.

“Eowyn, child,” he called more softly as he dismounted, not wanting to startle her.

“Go away! I don’t want boys,” was the surly response; she did not look up.

“I’m not a boy; I’m your uncle, and the King.”

“Oh!”

She swiped her arm across her face and clambered to her feet to give a clumsy curtsy accompanied by a hiccough.

“I’m sorry, Uncle.”

Theoden took her by the shoulders and felt her shiver. He turned up her chin with two fingers; her grey eyes were still glistening, and her tearstained cheeks were two spots of rosy color from the cold.

“As you should be,” he muttered sternly, shrugging out of his own cloak and wrapping it around her. “What on earth are you doing out here among the tombs?”

“I came to talk to mother.”

Theoden found his throat suddenly, uncomfortably tight, as though a stone was lodged there. He had not even realized that he had been riding among the tombs, never mind across his own sister’s grave. He gave himself a little shake, took the little flaxen-haired maiden by the hand, plucking the torch up out of the earth where he had planted it and leading the way through the grass back to his mare. He slowed his long, sure strides to match her short stumbling ones; she treaded constantly upon the hem of the cloak and was ever in danger of falling.

When she was safely nestled before him in the saddle and her pony ambling happily behind the mare, he gathered his composure.

“I was worried you were lost. Your mother would be very cross if she knew.”

“I know,” she answered unhappily. “I just miss her.”

“Aye. I miss her as well. She was a good woman.”

“She always listened to me when Eomer and Theodred were teasing. Theodred is mean, and Eomer does whatever he says...” Here she paused and looked up at him fearfully, seeming to realize that her description of her cousin might offend the King.

Theoden couldn’t help but chuckle; Theodred was a big lad, and a natural-born leader; he used both to his advantage. The boys were as thick as thieves, and Theoden had been glad – it had eased the pain of their parents’ passing for his young nephew. But not, it seemed, for his dear niece, who missed her mother’s kindness and soothing words.

“Theodred is mean,” he agreed, trying to imagine what Theodwyn might say in his place. “I’ll have to have a word with him.”

“No, don’t!” Eowyn cried, squirming in the saddle. “Please don’t. Theodred thinks that girls are silly. I wish I was a boy; then I’d show him!”

Theodred would change his mind about girls soon enough, Theoden thought amusedly, but kept the thought to himself.

“What would you show him, if you were a boy?” he asked instead.

“That I’m not silly; that I’m strong, and I can fight! I’d knock him off his horse and hit him with a sword!”

He could feel the tense excitement that filled her slim young body at the thought of battle, and chuckled again. She put him in mind of Eomund; her father had been a brilliant young warrior and a dear friend. His light had been extinguished far too soon.

“I’m sure you would,” he said aloud, to distract himself from somber thoughts. “You’d make a fine shieldmaiden.”

“Shieldmaiden?” Her inquiring tone indicated that the term was unfamiliar.

“Men are not the only ones who go to war; war touches us all. Who do you think defends our homes while the men and boys go out to fight? The grandfathers? No. The women of Rohan learned long ago that those without swords could still die upon them, so they took up shields and swords of their own, teaching themselves warcraft as well as weaving,” he explained.

“Could mother fight?” Eowyn chirped curiously.

“To my knowledge, your mother never touched a sword,” Theoden answered honestly, though when he felt her little shoulders slump, he thought it might have been kinder to lie.

“Was she not strong enough?”

Theoden thought of his sister’s slender back bent over the pallets of the injured and dying as she offered a kind word, a sip of cool water, a fresh bandage, a hand to hold, after each battle. He thought of her warm embrace, his anchor to the world when his own dear Elfhild had succumbed to childbed fever. He thought of her freely streaming tears as she sang the lament for her love when he was laid beneath these hills.

His sister had enough strength to move mountains.

His own tears slid down his cheeks, unbidden and – at last – unchecked.

“There are different kinds of strength, child,” he whispered, kissing the top of her head. “It’s more than just swinging swords.”

“Oh.”

A heartbeat.

“Can I still learn to use one?”

“Soon enough, dear one. Soon enough.”



J. R. R. Tolkien and The Lord of the Rings: "The Prayers at the Foot of the Altar" and The Dark Night of the Soul

By M. Carroll

The landscape and illumination of J.R.R. Tolkien's mind exposes far more than a vast and expansive fantasy world, but also a glimpse into a Catholic mind which understood implicitly that 'The Conqueror's Weapon is the Cross'. Without revisiting Tolkien's quotes regarding his faith, it is not possible to unravel the hidden Catholic code woven within The Lord of the Rings. For the uninitiated the following quote leaves us with no doubt that The Lord of the Rings is a Catholic work...

"The Lord of the Rings is, of course, a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision."

It is clear, as he stated himself, that his seminal work is not a straightforward allegory of the life of Christ, despite the fact that some allegorical aspects are present. The Lord of the Rings is rather an allegory of the Christian life. The quote which provides us with illumination to his inner spiritual life and spiritual inspiration for the book is as follows...

"I am a Christian, and indeed a Roman Catholic, so I do not expect history to be anything but a long defeat, though it contains (and in a legend may contain more clearly and movingly) some samples or glimpses of final victory. "

The Lord of the Rings, as such, can be seen as the story of the spiritual life portrayed in the "Prayers at the Foot of the Altar" from the Traditional Latin Mass, as well as the spiritual pathway of the Dark Night of the Soul by spiritual master and Doctor of the Church, St. John of the Cross.

Tolkien was an extremely devout practicing Roman Catholic who attended the Traditional Latin Mass daily. When the vernacular Novus Ordo Mass was first said in his own Church, he famously remonstrated the changes by shouting the original Latin over the English. Beyond this, if you do not believe that Tolkien was a devoutly practicing Catholic, then it may be of interest to learn that the cause for his canonization has recently begun.



Firstly, it is imperative to understand what the Catholic Church definitively teaches us concerning the true way of the Christian journey. The primary place to observe this teaching is in the Traditional Latin Mass, which is the greatest prayer of the Church. As someone who was fluent in Latin, Tolkien implicitly understood the direct translation of Psalm 42, which is known as the “Judaica Me”. The “Judaica Me” is part of the “Prayers at the Foot of the Altar” which reveal and teach us all about the true way and trials of the Christian life. The “Judaica Me” also reflects St. John's Dark Night of the Soul spiritual pathway. The “Prayers at the Foot of the Altar” are the first prayers of the Tridentine Mass, a Mass passed down from the apostles and developed slowly over 2000 years. At this point we are not looking for a direct link with the Mass and The Lord of the Rings, but, rather, the links between the battle of the spiritual life and our everyday battles with evil, in which Tolkien was well versed.

Psalm 42 reveals all...

“Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from the nation that is not holy:
deliver me from the unjust and deceitful man.

“For Thou, O God, art my strength: why hast Thou cast me off?
and why do I go sorrowful whilst the enemy afflicteth me?

“Send forth Thy light and Thy truth: they have led me
and brought me unto Thy holy hill, and into Thy tabernacles.

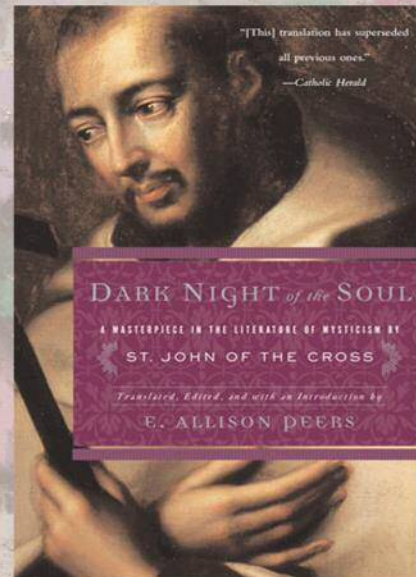
“And I will go in unto the Altar of God: unto God, Who giveth joy to my youth.
“I will praise Thee upon the harp, O God, my God: why art thou sad, O my soul?
and why dost thou disquiet me?

“Hope thou in God, for I will yet praise Him:
Who is the salvation of my countenance, and my God.”

Spiritually-minded traditional Catholics will instantly recognise this psalm as the basis of the true spiritual battle within the authentic Catholic life. It is also the battle set out in 2 Ederas 7 where it clearly states why God's people must suffer at some points along the narrow path. This liturgical, spiritual, and biblical narrative can be seen to also be the template for the unfolding battles and trials of The Lord of the Rings. Tolkien implicitly understood that the Christian life is one of a constant battle with evil, but in the same way that Psalm 42 warns us of our impending struggles, it also instructs and guides us to hope in God, to praise God, and to plead for light and truth. If we pray for light and truth, and have been purified through the confessional, Holy Communion, and an amendment of life, then we will be eventually released from the purgative stage of spiritual development, and into the light and truths of the Illuminative and Unitive stages as discussed by St. John of the Cross. Other saints write about the same pathway, but sometimes use different language. For instance, St. Francis de Sales and St. Catherine of Sienna (and others) refer to the purgative stage which Catholics must pass through to attain sainthood and heaven. St. John's way is simply the template which leads us in the fullness of the spiritual life.

“Send forth thy light and thy truth.... why do I go about sorrowful while the enemy afflicteth me... deliver me from the unjust and deceitful man...” These words underpin Tolkien's work, and Frodo and Sam's choice is either to believe in something greater, whilst undergoing great trials, or submit to evil. This is an allegory of the TRUE Christian life in which there is a final overarching destination which must be attained through an arduous battle with evil.

Having very briefly looked at the basic theology underpinning The Lord of the Rings, it is now time to scrutinise the larger scale battle of the great Catholic saints, mystics, and martyrs and how their life reflects the unfolding spectacle of Tolkien's vision.



The Lord of the Rings is not one ongoing episode of suffering. The story is punctuated with moments of providence in the form of rescues by eagles, and moments of peace such as at Rivendell. Tolkien, in his quote (above) tells us that Christianity is a constant battle, but one interspersed with glimpses of victory. In our Catholic lives, God will give us what are known as 'spiritual favours' (i.e. answer to prayer) if we earnestly pray for what we need and not what we want, but if we develop in the spiritual life, then we start to receive even greater gifts known as consolations. St. John teaches Catholics that we are not supposed to be chasing the “consolations of God” i.e. a constant request for spiritual favours and answer to prayer and asking for our own will, but we are supposed to be searching for the “God of Consolations”. It is in these consolations freely given by God (which we do not ask for, nor deserve) that we encounter these greater glimpses of victory, which will even amaze us. We see through hope and prayer that God is a “God of Consolations”. We should eventually stop praying for what we want, and accept God's will for us. If we are faithful to Christ (which ultimately means receiving Holy Communion in a state of grace with no known past or present sins and truly amending our lives), then God will give us these glimpses of victory and gifts and we will be at peace, because we understand in a deeper way that God truly loves us.

Contrary to the worldly meaning, a spiritual consolation is not second best, but the very best as it is chosen by God rather than man. God's consolations are far greater than anything we could ever imagine for ourselves. This long battle and journey, interspersed with great victories along the way, is the true story of The Lord of the Rings, but in the true spiritual life consolations can be far more than just victories...

In the most famous example of a spiritual consolation (though there are many different ones) we find a young St. Therese of Lisieux on her day of profession. Her interior trials since childhood have been hard since her mother died. Her favourite thing is snow, something which never appears in Lisieux, but after her profession she steps outside to see the convent grounds covered by snow. She is clear that she recognises this as a "consolation" from God, in which God has moved the heavens to show her how much He loves her.



Only someone who has been through much of the purgative stage of spiritual development would recognise this. It is important to recognise the consolations in our lives. How many times are our heroes in The Lord of the Rings snapped from the jaws of death and experience little victories, before the one final victory?

The Christian life is a tough spiritual battle to attain sainthood in which God will give us victories and gifts along the way to keep our spirits up. This is the true story of The Lord of the Rings.

Tolkien was a devout Roman Catholic who understood that the conqueror's weapon is the Cross. Tolkien was in some way, and to some degree, telling the story of his own interior spiritual life within the pages of The Lord of the Rings.

I see you, my friend,
Riding off again,
On orders from madmen.

You strive for success,
You give it your best,
But you won't pass the test.

You stand and you fight
With all of your might,
But here is your plight:

You can't prove your heart
If you can't reach the bar
Which is always too far.

You come back, my friend,
When you've reached the end,
And find it's moved again.

You never can win
If you follow such things,
So look for the King.

He'll know it's your best
And applaud your success
And then you can rest.

For there is no shame
In "losing" a game
Where all is in vain.

You're worth so much more
Than the madmen will score,
But you may be sure

When you see the King,
He'll acknowledge your win
And help you feel whole again.

A Chance For Faramir

By Sarah Levesque



For Wrath, For Ruin

By Avellina Balesri

This must be the end of all things for me, this height, this depth, this place. It presses down on me, shrinks me, and stifles me. I am used to roaming wide plains and tangled forests that are large enough to be lost in, that are empty enough for me to be alone, to have no counsel to take but my own. I am a ranger. I am a hunter. I am a tracker. I am the one the free peoples rely upon to warn them of incursions, to battle creatures lurking in the darkness, to spring forth and surprise them before they surprise me. I am used to feeling room to move, to breathe, to plan, to live another day. But this fortress feels different, suffocating, like a trap sprung, and I am like fish in a barrel, just like all these old men and beardless boys around me.

I have never been afraid of a fight, but this will be a slaughter. We are lost before we have begun. I know it. I can see it before my eyes, like waking nightmares. My every instinct tells me I am not safe, that flight is the only way I can fight another day. I am a man without a country; I should not be here, I should be outside these walls. I want to wander like the wolves, and howl at their faraway moon. I want to run away from this place, run away from this fate. But fate has always followed me, like a curse or a blessing, and none can escape her ways. She weaves the descent of the starlight, and the silver stroke that claims every soul in the end, no matter how far he may run, like the rivers that weave through the worlds and carry the boats of slain warriors to the field of bones, bleached snow-white as the hair of Galadriel, the Lady of Lothlorien.

Théoden the King knows wrath and ruin hang heavily over his last stronghold. His face is ashen, his eyes distant as the ages of the earth. He knows this is the end of all he has known, all he has fought for from the depths of his warrior soul, his steady-beating heart craving salvation for those under his power. He would readily sacrifice himself if he could win it; that is why the crown fits him so well. He would ransom his life's blood for the honor of his bond, and even on the edge of doom he would put on a brave face to steel the wills of those under his command. Yet even as his old armor is strapped upon him, he feels bound by shackles, I know he does. His legs shake within them, oh, that most honorable of kings! Why did such times come slithering like a serpent under his noble reign?

But he shall fight on still, unto the dread of the dawn, for his people, or what people he has left, the scattered warriors, too old or too young, the huddled women and frightened children. A massacre looms crimson on the horizon. It is going to rain, but I doubt there will be anyone to hear it pattering upon us, washing the blood away. Yet he will go up to the parapets to command his thralls once more, to wave the proud flag of the wild horse over his battlements for the last time. Even if it is for the sake of old memories, for the sake of all that once was and may never be again, I will stand beside him, and we will make an end for the bards to sing about. I fear they will prove a melancholy strain.

Legolas knows there is death upon this place. His Elvish senses are keen as his skill with the bow, swift as his arrows that cleave the air. He is a free spirit, ethereal like the halo of the moon, wild like the ferns of the forest. He is an undying one, unless an arrow or blade takes him in his youth. His jokes have died on his tongue often enough these past days, facing the abyss. We have quarreled, just as brothers would do, for though not of my blood we could not be closer. He does not wish to stay, but he stays for me, just as I stay for Théoden. If I did not, the free-flowing waters would curse me when my face reflected in them, or would poison me when I bent to drink from them. This is the curse and blessing of friendship, this the border, the brink, the chasm. We cannot explain it, but we live it. We all stay for each other in the face of death, though

each of us must face death alone.

I have spent too many years among the Elves, though I am not from them. The Northern Kingdom of my ancestors was destroyed long ago, and Gondor is but a shell of its former glories. I remember Boromir's dimming eyes, and my vow to save his beloved, beleaguered city. The poor man...how could I say anything else to him? He had fallen so low, and yet I could hardly blame him for the desperation of his zeal. At least he had a home to fight for, even to steal for. And what was I but a wanderer, an exile too uncertain of my own worth to claim the sword of my ancestors, the crown of their kings? The sword has been shattered, and the shards cut my dead friend's finger. How can I dare to grasp them up again and not bleed, to reforge them and not be burned?



And now they come, rolling in with the rain, the creatures with eyes red like burning coals, their language course, dark, jarring to my ears. I have spent years fighting them, this race bred to lay waste to man. Yet rarely have I bothered to wonder if they think or feel or fear. I have assumed they simply exist, like savage beasts exist, hideous and sharp-toothed, and we must kill them or be killed by them. Yet I wonder now if they ever fear death as we men do. I wonder what their thoughts are, as they march towards us. Do they wonder what we are thinking too? Is there nothing within them that questions this mission they have been set forth upon? What is at the pit of their own hatred of us? Is it mindless or has it been stoked by the hatred, the lies, the will of others?

There was a boy, Haleth, Son of Hama, who spoke to me before the fray. His face was wan from sleeplessness, his eyes pools of despair, his hair long, dirty and unkempt. He looked to me for hope, though I keep none for myself. He had a sword in his hands he had never swung before, one he was in truth too small to swing. I took it up in my own hands, imagined it to be the shattered one, and swung it in grand circles, showing more confidence than I felt. That is the nature of martial skill; it becomes deep-seated in our guts, our instincts, the underbelly of our darkened memory even when we do not know why we are doing it anymore. But the boy is given courage, for a moment at least, for there is always hope. Yes, always hope...even though I wept over his dead body by the oozing light of the morning. I kissed his forehead, and sheathed his sword, and spoke the words of blessing over him, that his soul might wing its way to the hall of his fathers.

The Elves come forth to aid us. I know it must be the work of Elrond, out of love for his daughter Arwen, out of love for me. Haldir is among them, princely as ever, serene in his eyes, nimble in his movements. I used to practice with him in the art of the blade and the bow. He is guardian of the northern borders, fierce in his defense of Elvish realms, yet a quiet soul, like a lake with waters that dip down into the heart of the earth and conceal treasures that lie there in the most sacred of secrecy. In my youth, I used to enjoy trying to make him react, to bring out just a hint of fire behind those timeless eyes. He rarely gratified me. Legolas was so much easier to provoke, but Haldir earned my greater respect through his restraint. I had missed him, missed his unshakable presence, but seeing him here, now, leading a battle formation, fills me with a mix of relief and horror. *I do not want him to die.*

Despite my misgivings, I tell him he is welcome and embrace him. It is yet another round of our little

game, testing to see if my humanity can rouse his Elvish indignation. But wonder of wonders, he hesitates, then hugs me in return. Does he know something I do not? Do his Elvish senses tell him this may be our end game? But there is no time to ponder; the Elves are readying their bows with as much grace as minstrels prepare their harps. The enchanted blades slide along their scabbards, coming forth to be baptized by the heavy rain. The battle horns pierce the gloom and break the heart beating high, covered like a shield by the evenstar. I touch the jewel that feels like a distant icy star, covered by clouds, just as the memory of her kisses are growing cold in my memory. Give me but one more dream of her...

But the only dream I may have as the battle swirls around me is the dream of death, stealing quietly through the din, like the last breath a soldier takes before he falls. I hear different languages flying about me, like wind, like darts, like death. I have grown up with these majestic tongues, delicate, musical, and sometimes deadly in their earnestness. These Elves are proud beings, and their greetings and battle orders alike roll off the tongue like primordial poetry. I understand them, though hardly any of these soldiers of Rohan do. To them, these enchanted creatures are more like shards of myth than reality. But I have learned that they are very real indeed; you can learn to love them, and they to love you in return, and a man might find enough similarities with them to make up for our differences.

Are the Orcs like that, then? Just ugly where the Elves are beautiful, and their pride twisted into hatred when all else had been stripped away until they willingly served their own oppressors? Is it that no one believes in their reality, but only their myth, and so they are lost in their own darkness? What has Sauron done to them, what has Saruman taught them? Will I ever know as my sword cleaves through their bodies and their blood sprays upon me and they twitch in their final agony on the ground? Will I ever know the final thoughts that run through their minds, will I ever know if they have souls that could have been saved but for the things they were taught to be? But today, as with every other day I have known, it is kill or be killed; they will show us no mercy, and none will shown to them by men or elves. I wonder...do they even know what mercy means, for surely they have never given it, nor has it ever been extended to them?

Yes...it is a slaughter, but not to the last man. The nation of Rohan will endure this night. But the Elvish soldiers have paid the price for them. Yes, down to the last archer. Perhaps the greatest treasures in Haldir's now-silent heart were his dreams of the sea, which he loved so dearly, yet dreaded so darkly, for it meant the fall of Lothlorien and the end of the world as he knew it. He did not even have to listen in shells to hear the ocean's roll as I did when I was young. He could envision the look of the azure water with his second sight. He was such a fickle lover of his lady the ocean, who beckoned to him though he would not come. Now I shall always listen in the shells every time I come upon them, not for the sound of the waves, but for the thump of his heartbeat.

When he took his final stand, I cried out to him in his own language, that he might warn his archers as we retreated to the keep, before they were cut off from all succor. But it was too late. As always, he would be



the last to try and leave, though none could escape the net closing around them. The orcs set upon them on either side, slashing through Elvish chainmail. He slew as many as he could with his blade singing, until the enemy blade thrust itself through his body. I saw him stagger forward, struggle to remain upright, and I thought I might die of sorrow, for I could not reach him. I saw him meet my gaze for a moment, then felt my heart shatter as he gazed vacantly at his slain archers lying in a circle around him. I had never before seen him visibly shocked, and it shook me to the core. Ah yes, this immortal one should be shocked...he was so unaccustomed to seeing death. In this, we men are more immune, more grimly stoic than he was, that fair warrior innocent.

And I saw that innocent receive his death-wound as yet another blade sliced through his back. He did not even try to defend himself, did not even try to escape. He would die with his kinsmen, die as his race was dying, leaving, fading, giving over their last glimmer, like the fading of the first day of creation, too beautiful to last forever. I am finally able to break through to him, rush to his side. I catch him as he falls into my arms. There is a flickering spark of life left in his eyes, even as the blood trickles down his mouth. It speaks to me.

Is this the way of you mortals? Is this the thing you most fear? We have tasted it now, though we are unused to it...I am unused to it...you see? it is a terror to face it alone...oh, Estel, teach me how...stay with me...

I stay, my hand placed over his heart. I will not leave him until his spirit leaves him. The blood is soaking through his clothes, staining my hands as I cradle him, but even though his breathing weakens he does not struggle as I have seen men do. He is not even bitter, simply resolved to submit to that which must be. I wonder what he thinks of now...I wonder whom he misses most, for I can see the loss dawning in him, the loss men have long learned to fear. But then that serenity comes back to him, that strange Elvish knowing, melancholy and resigned, and he places his hand over mine, and whispers in his language what he sees spilling forth from the future.

U i vethid...Na I onnad...This is not the end...this is the beginning...Aragorn, King of Men...

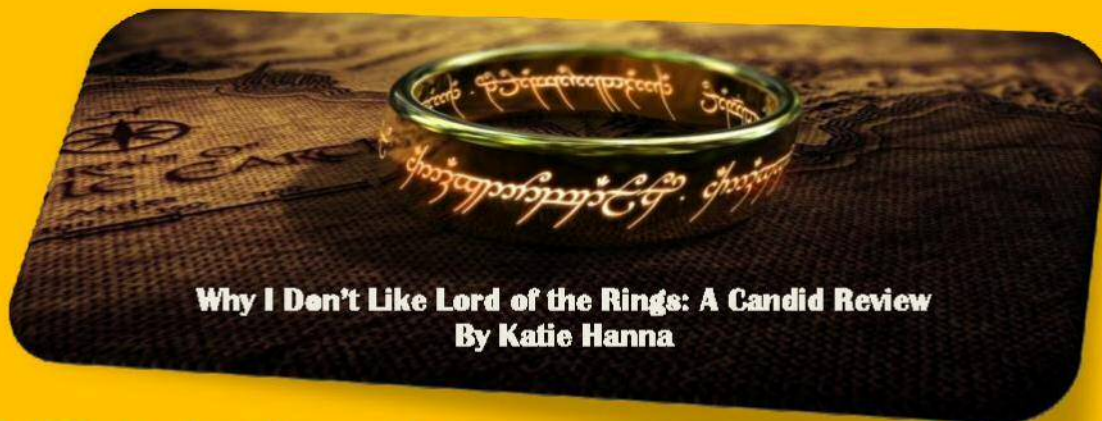
Days have passed now since his eyes emptied of light, and I grieve for all that has been lost, all that I am losing, all that I am being called to do, yet that I may fail to fulfill. I even grieve for death itself. Surely it must be saddened to rob the life in face of such gallant opposition. Yet death has touched me as well, slaying my old life, and seeming to grant me the terrifying gift of a new one. *Aragorn. King.* The words, jumbled together, running over and over again in my mind, make me tremble.

I see in Lady Eowyn's eyes the color of the ocean, and it knows the depths of my soul. She comes to me as I sit alone on the steps of her uncle's royal mead hall. In her hands there is a shell, gray on the outside, but containing the colors of the rainbow within. It holds fresh water in it for me to drink, to cool my cracked lips, and I oblige her by raising it to my mouth. I drink to the victorious dead, and imagine the gray ships bearing souls over the many colors of the horizon where they are ever bound to the circles of the worlds, and yet become more than memory.

"Ves hael," she whispers in her people's ancient tongue. "Be well."

The sun sets red against the mountains, and I take her smooth white hand, like the petals of the first blossoms of spring, and bring it to my lips In gratitude. It is sweeter to me than the water, as is the rose blooming in her cheeks. There are crystal tears melting from the blue of her compassionate gaze, and the sea could not have been more mesmerizing. I thought I heard its waves tumultuous against the shores of her golden hair, like the sunlit sand, and her footsteps along the corridors lull me to sleep. They do not bring dreams of the ethereal lingering of elves, but of the hearty survival of men. Our future. Our world.

This is not the end, no, this is the beginning...Aragorn, King of Men...



Why I Don't Like Lord of the Rings: A Candid Review By Katie Hanna

Before I start, I'd like to get one thing very clear:

I am not here to trash *Lord of the Rings*.

I am not here to criticize its artistry. I am not here to say anything against its moral values. I am not here to make *anyone* feel guilty for enjoying this story, in *anyway*. I'm only here to talk about why it doesn't work for me, personally. As a single individual whose perspective is subjective and limited, just like everyone else's.

Pippin's voice Right, then! Let's dive in, shall we?

[No lie, Pippin is very rather cute.]

All my life, I've felt a curious sort of palpable . . . darkness . . . surrounding the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. It began when my older brother was reading the series and I, being an inquisitive little girl, picked up *The Fellowship of the Ring* and leafed through it. It made me oddly sad. I didn't even understand a quarter of the situations involved, I just *felt* that it was sad. Like a cold, damp wind blowing in my face.

That turned me off LotR for quite a long time. A year or two ago, though, I persuaded myself to pick up *The Fellowship* a second time. "I'm a big girl now, I can handle Dark Stuff!" Well . . . apparently not. I didn't even make it out of the Shire before I felt myself being sucked into what can only be described as a black hole of depression. I had to quit.

Somehow, all this wasn't enough??? I should've known better; but somehow, I decided this 'darkness problem' only applied to the books themselves. Not the movies. So yesterday afternoon, I curled up in my favorite chair with my laptop, determined to watch *The Fellowship of the Ring* all the way to the end.

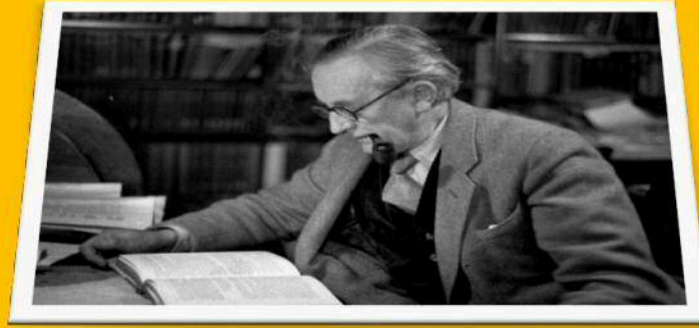
Massive fail. I only made it to Lothlorien before I hit Depression Overload and shut the thing off for good.

But *this* time—something happened. This time, about two-thirds of the way through (and with the help of a between-scenes text convo with a dear friend), something clicked into place. I *finally* understood why I don't like Tolkien. Now I'm here to explain it to you all.

Simply put: I don't like this story, because it exploits my deepest and darkest fear. Which is:
The fear of becoming *evil*.

Everyone is afraid of something, aren't they? But what you fear *most*, depends on who you are. Some people fear being alone. Unloved. Unwanted. Some people fear failure, or their own incompetence. Some people fear control or domination. Me? I fear becoming evil. More specifically—being made evil *against my will*. I fear being turned into a monster. I'm deathly afraid of having my mind and soul poisoned . . . by what? Oh, I don't know. Take your pick. Evil desire. Falsehood. Manipulation. Addiction. Just *poison*.

At which point, good ol' J.R.R. Tolkien leaps out of his leather armchair, enthusiastically waving a long-stemmed pipe and shouting, "DID I HEAR SOMEONE SAY 'POISON'? I'LL SHOW YOU POISON!"



heavy sigh

Yes, Professor Tolkien. That's exactly my problem. *That's* why I can't enjoy your stories. You took my Absolute Worst Fear . . . fear of a poisoned mind, a poisoned soul . . . and you distilled it into a single, highly potent, omnipresent symbol: the One Ring of Power.

That's the thing about the One Ring. There is no escape from its clutches. No one is safe. No matter how good, how strong, how kind, how pure—everyone falls in the end. Even Frodo Baggins, and he's literally the Christ-figure of all Middle Earth. He doesn't just feel temptation. He yields to it. It was by sheer chance that the Ring was finally destroyed, instead of Frodo keeping it forever, a slave to its withering cruelty. CORRUPTION. IS. EVERYWHERE. Corruption spreads its tentacles through this entire universe . . . without even the promise of a pure Savior to compensate.

If you're someone like me, that's not the setup for a thrilling adventure saga. That's the setup for a frickin' horror movie.

When I try to read the books, or watch the films, I honestly feel as if I'm the one *wearing* the Ring. I'm wearing the Ring, and it's sucking the life out of me and turning me into something sad and hopeless, deformed and monstrous. I believe (and y'all can correct me if I'm wrong) many Tolkien fans love this story because it's an epic battle between light and dark which they can cheer on from the sidelines, knowing the light will triumph. For me . . . the battle is taking place *inside my mind*. And THE DARKNESS IS WINNING.

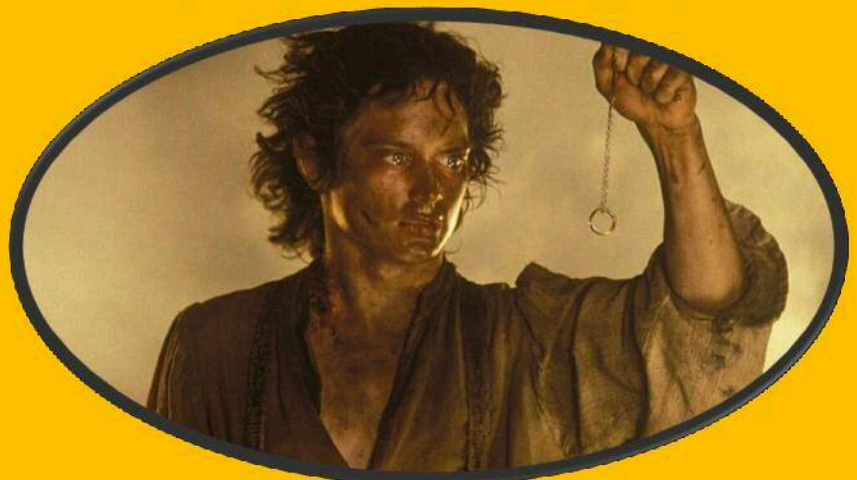
(That's about the point where I quit, every time. When I feel like the darkness is taking over.)

In my own life, I believe in the Light. I believe in goodness. And (most days), I believe in the promise of my own salvation. I'm not planning on letting go of these things. But Tolkien's story, it seems, has the power to make me loosen my grip. I know that absolutely was *not* what he intended when he wrote it. And that's why I'll be avoiding *Lord of the Rings* from now on.

Because Tolkien - the man, the artist, the Christian - would never want any of his readers to feel that way.

I know people have a ton of feelings on this subject, so...

Thoughts?





What Eowyn Saw

By Ranger of the North

Aragorn had finally rejoined his friends and allies in Helm's Deep, but there was much that needed to be prepared. He had been about to plunge into the work, directing soldiers and guiding women and children into the safety of the caves, when King Théoden stopped him. Aragorn had protested at first, reluctant to leave when there was so much to be done, but Théoden insisted that he clean himself up first and tend to his wounds. And he did have to admit, he could do with a change of clothes.

So here Aragorn was, in an out-of-the-way chamber that had been set aside for him. He eased his clothes painstakingly off his aching body. A floor-to-ceiling, dingy mirror rested against the far wall, and Aragorn glanced at his reflection in it. His body was battered and bled from many wounds, and he felt exhausted. But none of that mattered – he was alive, and he would live to see another day. It had never been his intention to go and die, and leave his friends to fight their battles without him.

Aragorn picked up a shirt of mail, rubbing the chain links between his fingers. Looking down, he did not see the door open, only heard the creak of the rusty hinges.

He froze. The sound of footsteps echoed in the doorway, then stopped abruptly. "Lord Aragorn, my uncle has sent me to bring you some food – Oh!" A gasp, then dead silence.

Aragorn's heart sank. There was only one person he knew with that voice, and who would call King Théoden "uncle", for that matter. Looking up slowly, he said, "Eowyn?"

She stood stock-still in the center of the room, holding a plate of sausages in one hand and a glass of water in the other. An expression of shock and horror was frozen on her face. Try as she might, she could not stop her eyes from trailing over his unclothed body. She could not help but see the deep, bloody gashes on his chest where a Warg had raked its claws across him, or the painful-looking bruise on his shoulder where he'd fallen on the sharp rocks of the river. For a second longer, she was frozen, unable to move. Then, regaining control of her limbs, she dropped the dishes with a clatter onto a small table and turned and fled without a word, racing out of the room and down the hall.

Aragorn sighed. That had not gone well at all. Stiffing a colorful Elvish curse, he straightened out the mail shirt he still held and pulled it on over his head, wincing when it rubbed against his wounds. Once he was fully dressed, he leaped out of the room and dashed down the hall, looking for Eówyn. He had to dodge and weave to avoid warriors of Rohan who came bustling by, garbed in full battle armor. From between tall mail-clad men, he caught a brief glimpse of a young woman with long, flowing blond hair.

"Eówyn, wait!" Aragorn shouted, but the clanking of armor and weapons nearly drowned out his voice completely. When he finally caught up to her, panting, he called her name softly. "Eówyn."

Eówyn shook her head and tried to run away again, but he reached out and grabbed her arm. She flinched at his touch, but did not move away. He pulled her gently into a small, sheltered alcove where they could speak in private.

"I-I-I'm so sorry, my lord," she stammered, her voice shaking. "I never m-m-meant to s-see you like that."

"I know," Aragorn told her kindly. He tried to look in her eyes, but she would look anywhere but at him.

"Your wounds," she said, her concern for him winning out over her mortification. "I had no idea that you'd been hurt so badly... Surely you will rest a little before the battle?" She raised her head to look at Aragorn, but as she did, the image of him standing naked and badly wounded flashed unbidden before her mind's eye, and a deep blush spread over her features. She buried her face in her hands as waves of embarrassment and shame washed over her.

Aragorn knew all too well what she must be thinking of. He touched her hand gently. "Eówyn. Do not be ashamed. It is all right."

She looked up at him disbelievingly. "You're not angry at me?" she asked, her voice edged with doubt.

"No, of course not. It was an honest mistake." He paused, and gave her a comforting smile. "Far worse things have happened to me than being walked in on by a friend."

Somewhat cheered up, Eówyn gave him a small, hesitant smile in return. They stood there together a moment longer, alone in the isolated alcove.

"Now." Aragorn straightened his back. His wounds stung, and it felt like someone was stabbing him in the chest with a spear every time he took a breath, but he tried hard not to show his pain in front of Eówyn. "Thank you for the food. Tell your uncle I will return as quickly as I can."

"I will – but there is no need for you to hurry. We have some time before the battle, and you look as if you could use the rest," she answered quickly, an expression of relief on her face.

Aragorn nodded, but then a wave of weariness passed over him, and he leaned heavily against the wall, bringing a hand to his chest.

Eówyn's eyes widened in concern, and she laid her hand on his arm gently. "Are you all right?"

Aragorn hastily dropped his arm to his side and stopped leaning against the wall, trying to appear as if he wasn't in pain. "I will be fine, in time," he reassured her, giving her a wry half-smile. "It is not every day that I fall off a cliff, though I have endured worse wounds before. But it would take more than that to finish me off."

She nodded quickly and hurried away, with perhaps a bit more speed than usual. Aragorn watched her go, feeling a surge of affection for her rise up inside him. He knew that this conversation must have been incredibly awkward for her. And he did not wish to draw it out even longer, when clearly she wanted to be anywhere but here right now.

But he still wished he could have told her how her friendship took his pain away. How her bright smile brightened every dark moment in his mind. He knew their time together, only a brief moment in their lives, would be fleeting, but their friendship would not. This friendship would last forever.



~

Meanwhile, Eówyn raced back down the hall and ducked out onto an empty, deserted balcony to catch her breath and collect her thoughts. She slowly sank down to the ground, leaning back against the cool stone wall.

Countless emotions whirled through her mind. Remnants of shock and mortification from seeing a man with no clothes on, and Aragorn at that! Worry and empathy for his wounds. Wonder and gratitude that he had not been angry at her. And respect, because he was, well, *Aragorn*. What more was there to say?

Perhaps she felt a bit more than just respect towards him...

What was it with this man? Aragorn seemed to be the exception to every rule Eówyn used to think she knew about men. He was not self-centered, nor was he prone to boasting. He never underestimated Eówyn, never thought less of her because she was a woman. There was a certain power that seemed to practically radiate off of him. A nobility – no, more than that – a *kingliness*.

Eówyn was not intimidated by most men. Neither was she afraid to speak her mind to them, to show them what this shieldmaiden of Rohan was really made of. Yet somehow, Aragorn made her speechless every time. She always found herself staring at him, her mind suddenly and inconveniently blank.

And then there was that feeling she had when she saw him. The way her heart beat faster whenever he spoke. The way her skin tingled when he touched her.

Sometimes she was surprised he even stopped to talk to her. Few men of high rank would converse with a lady like her, even one who was a relative of the King of Rohan. Yet he had done more than just talk to her; he had called her a *friend*. And after she'd just walked in on him, at that!

Eówyn did not know what the future would hold. She did not know the outcome of the impending battle, or if her people would survive to see another dawn. If she herself would.

But there was one thing she knew for certain: She would stand by Aragorn and fight at his side till the very end.

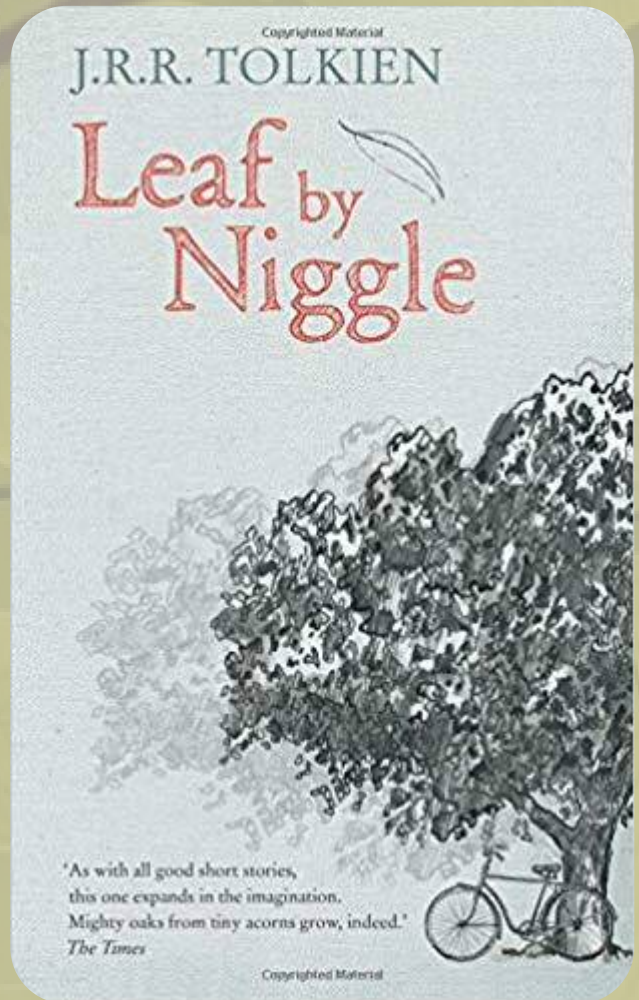


Author's Note: It might seem kind of like Aragorn loves Eówyn back, but he just likes her as a friend. I am a firm believer in Aragorn+Arwen!

The Man Who Painted Leaves

By MariaTeresa Carzon

A synopsis of Leaf by Niggle:
Niggle is an unsuccessful painter whose favorite subjects are leaves. He decides one day that he will attempt to paint an entire tree. As a trip he can't get out of approaches, he is afraid his piece will not be finished due to unavoidable distractions. A chaperone for his journey comes to take him away, and he is put in a workhouse where he remains for some time.



Wizards, hobbits, and evil orcs are what J. R. R. Tolkien is famous for. But, one of his stories is just as captivating without these fantastical characters. It comes in the form of a novella. *Leaf by Niggle* is a deep piece full of symbolism and thought. Tolkien finished writing it in 1939 and had it published in the Dublin Review in January of 1945. The story was inspired by his then current life situation and his fears about the future. *Leaf by Niggle* can be analyzed in three areas: the Christian themes throughout it; how it reflects the author's life; and the similarities between it and other stories by Tolkien, such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*.

First, there are many parts of the story that relate to Christian ideas. The journey that Niggle must go on is a metaphor for the journey to heaven that one takes when one dies. He tries to put off the trip and does not know when he will be called. Many signs, such as the slowing down of visitors and the gossip about his possible soon departure, indicate that he must be very ill. Niggle himself knows he must leave soon but neglects to prepare and ends up being caught off guard at the time of parting. When Niggle does pass, he is put in a workhouse where he stays until he lets go of his anger and stress about life. After accepting his situation, he is allowed to move on. This represents the Catholic Christian idea of Purgatory where one makes up for one's sins before being brought into heaven.

As Niggle continues on, he is learning about what is truly important and even makes peace with his former colleague from earth. He and Parish, his old friend, collaborate on finishing a landscape of trees and plants using Niggle's creative designs and Parish's knowledge of gardening. Among this work is Niggle's tree, appearing in its full magnificence beyond what he had imagined in his final days. This shows that God makes us complete and perfect. Upon finishing the countryside scene, Niggle decides to continue on to the mountains. He is ready to move closer to heaven through an unexplored land which he was unable to conceive of during his time being alive.

The themes found in this story are based upon the life of the author, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, better known as J. R. R. Tolkien. Born in Southern Africa in 1892 to Arthur Reuel Tolkien and Mabel Suffield, Tolkien moved to England when his father died and was raised Roman Catholic by a priest after his mother passed as well. His devotion to Catholicism is often illustrated in his works, usually with references to sin and, as in *Leaf by Niggle*, plot lines involving Purgatory. He studied English Language and Literature in college and began writing. While in the midst of developing *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien wrote *Leaf by Niggle* which compares his struggles in finishing the popular trilogy to Niggle's tree painting. "It arose from my own pre-occupation with *The Lord of the Rings*, the knowledge that it would be finished in great detail or not at all, and the fear (near certainty) that it would be 'not at all,'" Tolkien wrote in a letter. This is the same view that Niggle had toward his final piece. Perhaps in pouring some of his ideas into *Leaf by Niggle*, he was able to see through finishing the trilogy more easily.

Themes are similar in several of Tolkien's works. In *Leaf by Niggle* the main character has to go on a long, hard journey to overcome sin, a key element to the plotline in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. Niggle, Bilbo, and Frodo go through many struggles on their way to an important destination, learning what it means to be good and finding their purpose in the world. By carrying the ring, Bilbo overcomes his temptation to sit back at home and put the burden onto someone else; he sacrifices his comfort to protect others from an evil. Frodo discovers true bravery when he agrees to continue his uncle's journey and at last destroy the ring. And finally, Niggle learns how to consider other people's feelings and to set aside personal gain to repair his relationship with an old friend. Although each is seen as naïve and childish, each of them prove to be the most valuable person in finishing a task. *Leaf by Niggle* is much shorter than all of these other stories but carries just as much impact.

Tolkien is a widely influential and beloved author and his wonderfully imaginative and theologically insightful works are loved even to this day. All of his pieces can be examined in regards to their religious themes, how they correlate to his own life, and how they are similar to and build off of each other. Although a great deal shorter than his better-known writings, *Leaf by Niggle* is just as reputable as a Catholic reference. So, if you've read *The Lord of The Rings* and *The Hobbit* and are looking for more from that author or want a beginner's introduction to his style, pick up this short story about an anxious soul and his journey to heaven. Even without ghosts, elves, and dwarves, *Leaf by Niggle* is an incredibly significant story.



Creatures of Hobbit

Hope Bolinger

We are all creatures of hobbit,
A little less human each day
As we wither into weather,
Into whether, like Baggins,
Never wondering where our
Adventure begins.

As creatures of hobbit,
We wander and are lost
In rhymes and riddles,
In precious things that
Glitter like gold
But sure aren't Shire,
Or even Rivendell.

But as creatures of hobbit
We carry those with a ring
Of death around their neck.
We sing of Bombadils and
Every-going roads to heal
All ills of a Mordor-world.

Yes, we're hobbit and human
Too, heroes the world never
Saw coming up the misty mountains
There, and back again, human,
And hobbit.

The Lady of Rohan

By Killarney Traynor

I remember well when Eowyn first came among us. She was a child then, a fair thing with long hair the color of spun gold and eyes that snapped with hidden fire. How I envied the way she rode on that fine grey pony, head erect and shoulders back, a queen in the making. You would have thought she'd just returned from conquering countries or slaying dragons instead of the truth: Orcs had slain her father and their mother succumbed to grief. She and her handsome brother, Eomer, were orphans, alone and not alone, as is often the case with royalty.

"Have you ever seen anyone so grand in your life, Maebh?" my mother asked in her breathless fashion. "Won't it be nice to be making pretty garments for a change?"

My mother was a laundress, seamstress, and sometime spinner at Meduseld and, as one of the staff, had been ordered to assemble and be presented to the new arrivals. My father remained at his place in the foundry, where I had been until my mother came to fetch me.

I studied the new girl. I was older than her and I too had blond hair, but mine was curly and constantly in knots. As one of the few daughters in a compound filled with sons, my dresses were usually muddy and I could just as easily be found mock-fighting with the lads, watching my father at his work, or helping my mother at her tasks.

Life as a castle servant is a strange thing. The arrival of Eowyn and Eomer had been spoken of for weeks. Prince Theodred was beside himself with excitement at the prospect of having cousins live with him and told everyone everything he knew or suspected about them. We were quick to catch on to his enthusiasm and every detail was discussed, enlarged, added to, and ruminated on until it seemed that there was nothing we did not know. And yet we were strangers to them and destined to remain so.

"She's shorter than I expected," I said.

"She's but a girl," my mother replied. "You can play with her."

I didn't think a pristine statue of a child like Eowyn would deign to lower herself to play with me, but I let my mother think as she liked.

We had decorated Meduseld to welcome the orphans in a stately fashion and I was drafted to help serve at the welcoming banquet for them. I was too short to serve drinks, but not to carry in plates, which I did with the pages and squires. The grand hall was filled to capacity and the temperature was stifling with body heat. Ale was drunk, toasts were given, and it was all we servers could do to keep up with our tasks while dodging flailing arms and darting around the dogs that snapped up bits from the table.

Flanking their triumphant uncle at the head table, Eowyn and Eomer looked small and lost, though Theodred, sitting next to Eomer, did his best to distract them. When Theoden announced that Eomer would immediately begin his knightly training, the prince pumped his fist and cheered and Eomer smiled for the first time. The news pleased me more than it should. Eomer was a handsome lad and I was a frequent visitor to the training sessions.

Eowyn was also pleased. Her face brightened and unexpectedly her eyes caught mine. Children connect easier than adults. We saw at once each other's loneliness and isolation, she motherless in a new land, me a lone girl in a man's world, and like recognized like. I grinned, then she grinned, and in that moment we were friends.

Our association most likely would have ended there, had it not been for Eomer's training.

Like all castle-strongholds, there is a field set aside for warriors, knights, and squires to work their skills and, for convenience sake, it is not that far from the smithy where my father plied his trade. When I wasn't being taught to follow in my mother's work, I was either on the training field or in the blacksmith's shop with my father.

I loved watching my father work: blending molten metals, pounding swords, shields, and even dishware into shapes. He taught me how to blend and mold daggers and knit tiny pieces of metal into chainmail. I learned arrow making too – strong, slender, and light, with tips so sharp a strong bowman could pierce armor. My father also taught me to etch, and as his eyes weakened, I took over a good deal of this delicate work. At least, I did until Felim arrived. But we haven't come to him yet.

My days weren't all work and training. I played with the other children of the palace and I loved to spar with the small, blunted swords kept on hand for training purposes. I would fence with any squire who was willing, and I became adept. Theodred was the first to call me Shield Maiden and often would challenge me to duels. Soon the other boys followed suit and it was during one of these mock-tourneys that Eowyn first appeared on the training ground.

I didn't see her at first, though I noted the immediate change in my opponent's tactics. Unwilling to lose to a girl in front of a girl, he began to press me hard and I nearly lost my footing. A quick feint and fast footwork sent him tumbling and I was declared the winner of the match. Eowyn's high voice rang out among the others in congratulation and she wasted no time in running over to me.

"You fight with boys," she said, by way of introduction.

"Just in fun, my lady," I said, though a bit starstruck. "We don't mean any harm."

"You will teach me?" she asked. Her shining eyes were on my short sword and her body was tense with repressed excitement.

"Teach you, my lady?"

"Call me Eowyn. I will be friends with you. What is your name?"

"Maebh." It was all I could do to keep myself from saying "My lady."

"Maebh." She stumbled on the unfamiliar word.

"Maebh. That's a good name for an instructor. You will teach me, for the sword master refuses."

"But..." It did not seem right for a lady to fight with swords. It was all right for me; I was a servant's daughter, without class or higher responsibilities. "Are you sure you want to?"

Her gaze left the sword and latched on to me instead.

"I am sure I need to," she said firmly. "I will not be helpless."

Naturally, one doesn't disregard an order from the lady of the house and, in any case, I was desperate for female friends. We began that morning, Eowyn holding the sword with two hands, tripping over her long skirts, and I in my ragged short dress with the sword alternating between my right and left hands. Eowyn tripped on her skirt three times, always popping back up from the mud with determination and laughter. We parted amicably and I went back to my mother, feeling as though I'd broken a rule and gotten away with it.

I needn't have worried. The king roared in laughter



when he saw Eowyn, coated in sweat and mud, beaming with pride of accomplishment. The order for divided, shorter skirts filtered down to my mother shortly thereafter and our training and friendship continued.

Eowyn was quick to learn and soon assumed the title of Shield Maiden. Together we grew in skill and speed, and one day the sword master relented and began giving us lessons. It was a glorious time and I loved it.

There was a marked difference in the way we trained. I worked for fun, to escape everyday chores and to be outside in the sunlit training field. Eowyn trained as though her life depended upon it. She practiced footwork until it flowed like dance steps. She worked her blade until it flashed fire in the sun. Her tenacity and prowess soon won the admiration of all the squires, her brother included.

"You fight as though the world relies on you," Eomer said one day, after a grueling duel that left both of them panting.

"How do you know it doesn't?" she responded, with a confident toss of her head.

"Mind yourself, Eomer," Theodred laughed. "Else she will outshine us all!"

Her ability with the sword was matched by her kindness. I've seen her drop her sword in the middle of a match to return a fallen chick to its nest and later, when the fever ravaged the servant quarters, it was her nursing that helped save the ones who survived, myself included.

For a few years, we were the best of friends, spending time together both on and off the sparring field. But time passed and things changed. Theodred and Eomer were sent away to train with other men. The king drafted tutors to teach Eowyn more refined arts and began to search for husbands.

Her new studies cut into her training sessions, something she resented. "He intends to pluck my wings and cage me like any other prized bird. I'll not have it, Maebh. I'll not have it!"

We had little choice. My workload increased and I too had less time for the training fields. I spent hours doing needlework and cleaning while Eowyn disappeared into the veiled world of leadership and privilege.

Then the fever came and I was laid up. My mother succumbed and passed and the fever took the remainder of my father's eyesight. My hair was shorn and grew back wild, curly, and dingy brown. I felt, in many ways, that I shrank into my station even as Eowyn, tall, willowy, with hair like a golden halo, grew into her own.

When my father recovered, an apprentice was assigned to him, a young man from a nearby village. Thus I met Felim. Eowyn had many suitors, I only the one, and yet I never envied her. Felim and I were perfectly suited for each other. We married with little fuss, and were happy in our small, contained world. But outside, darkness was spreading across the land like a stain across a beautiful table cloth.

The first real indication that we had that anything was wrong was when Theoden fell ill. It was a shocking thing, for he'd always been so strong. Eowyn's tender side came to the fore. She devoted herself to caring for him, giving up her lessons, even the last vestiges of her military training, to running the house and caring for the king. And it was around then that Grima arrived.

We called him Wormtongue, for he had a diabolically marvelous way of planting ideas in one's head so that you thought they were your own. His ascent was sharp and once ensconced in the king's ear, there he remained. Rohan's reputation and defenses went to the wayside under his



unofficial reign, and the honor of Theoden himself was brought into question. As the king's health worsened, Grima's influence grew. There were rumors of curses and poisons, and talk of a marital alliance between him and Eowyn, but she soon put an end to that.

"As though I'd allow him to lay a hand on me," she'd snorted when I asked her.

Worn from her duties and frustrated by her own helplessness, Eowyn would come to the servant's quarters to talk with me. She knew, as I did, that the world outside was darkening, but we did not know by how much. Eomer and Theodred patrolled the borders, fending off orcan raids and keeping the kingdom as secure as possible without true support from the sovereign. The occasional messages that Eomer sent were light on details. I suspected then, as I do still, that Grima interfered with Eowyn's correspondence.

I worried about Eowyn. Her spark had dwindled, her energy was sapped, and her once fierce defiance of convention was wearing thin.

"I'm tired all the time," she complained.

"Worry ages a body," I replied.

"I wish Eomer were here."

It was, I think, the first and last time I heard her wish for a man's aid.

Eomer did return, and for a brief moment her flame was restored. She shed ten years of responsibility when that young man walked through the door, but it was preciously short-lived. I remembered catching a brief glimpse of his white face as he stalked into the king's room to make his report. It didn't take long before news filtered downstairs to us: Theodred was dead and the world was going to war.

Theoden's response was immediate: he arrested Eomer and drove the boy from his sight.

The entire castle mourned the loss of the loveable prince. Eowyn was beside herself with grief and fury. She raged and ranted to me, her hands balled into fists.

"What can I do?" she demanded. "Spring him from prison?"

That was impossible, of course. Theoden still held absolute sway and the prince's death seemed to shove him further under Wormtongue's control. No one could stand against his machinations.

"I *will* not stand by idle!" she roared when I said as much. She was pale and shaking, her grey eyes bright with unshed tears and fury. "I *cannot*, Maebh! I must do something, something to shake the shame of dishonor from our realm. Give me *something* to do!"

So I did. I went to the corner where I hid things, and pulled out our practice swords, dull and heavy items. I handed her one and she stared at it, then at me, uncomprehending.

"Revolt is impossible," she said.

"Especially with that," I laughed, though it was no light matter. "We prepare, my lady. This situation will not remain forever and when the change comes, we will be ready for it." When she still hesitated, I said with more confidence than I felt, "It is what we can do, Eowyn."

She nodded and followed me out into the training field.

We worked in secret. It would not have done for Grima to know what we were doing. Eowyn's time was divided between tending Theoden, visiting Eomer, avoiding Grima's wandering hands, and renewing her acquaintance with the sword and me. We kept Eowyn's training clothes in my hut and practiced regularly, fighting until we were breathless and sore. Eventually, others learned of it and began their own sessions, and soon a small, defiant army was forming. Servant and serf, warrior and washwoman. All were anxious, you see. We knew that Wormtongue was merely a symptom of a larger disease, though no one was brave enough to come right out and say it.

No one, that is, until Gandalf returned.

Wizards are rarities in these parts and certainly few carry the weight of legend that Gandalf the Grey – I should say, the White – bore. He had come once before, when he was still the Grey, and had been rudely thrown out by Theoden – even then, Grima's grip was tight. This time, however, Gandalf's powerful and confidence was such that we knew, even



from the brief glance that we had of him from a distance, that the whole world was about to change. And so it proved. He and the little band of mismatched, road-weary warriors strode into the throne room and transformed it. How this occurred, we down below were not privy to. One minute, Grima is all but king, the next Théoden was calling for his sword and his nephew and offering his military services to Gandalf. Wormtongue was cast out, Eomer released, and Rohan breathed freely.

Eowyn was revived and not simply because of her family's release from bondage. There was a man in Gandalf's group, tall and lean with grey in his shaggy hair. He was from the west and though he dressed as a Ranger, there was something about him that set him apart from the others. I'd have thought he was royalty had I not known different, but he certainly was a

leader. Gandalf commanded everyone's respect, but Aragorn had their loyalty.

He also had Eowyn's heart. It wasn't the first time she'd fallen – the first had been brief and painful – but still she was not the type to fall in love easily. Respect, admiration, and a release from long captivity no doubt played their parts, but the emotion was real, for all that created it. She fell and he did not notice.

Rohan went to war. Theoden decided to personally lead his forces, leaving Eowyn in charge in his absence. It was a wise decision, as Eowyn had practically been running the country during the king's illness. But still it sat ill with Eowyn.

With the declaration of war, everything changed. Rohan was no longer safe and could expect to be invaded by Sauron's forces at some point. Felim and his workers toiled day and night preparing, repairing, and creating armor and weapons for the departing warriors. My discovering my pregnancy at this time proved fortunate – Felim was exempted from following the army and remained home.

Gandalf, Theoden, Aragorn, Eomer, and the others took their leave, a fine band of resolute men, but so small in number that I know I wasn't the only one who fretted about their safety. Eowyn stood tall and stoic as she watched their departure. Her eyes, though, gave her away; we were performing an important task at home, but she longed for more. The pale, helpless look that had disappeared with Gandalf's appearance had returned and my heart was touched.

"You do well to remain here," I said. "We have need of you."

"I understand my duty," she said. "Yet I cannot help but feel I am called elsewhere. My heart... it is not bound to this place."

Eowyn was a natural leader and we found ourselves looking to her, not only for instruction, but also for reassurance. She put together a team of leaders and managed



everything with competence, kindness, and regal poise. During the day, she was a pillar of strength. At night, when she thought no one was watching, she would prowl the outer defenses, always looking towards the distant battlefields where her heart and mind were.

Refugees and wounded began pouring in. Somehow we found places for everyone. I put my seamstresses to work making clothes, bandages, and tents. Eowyn focused on increasing food and supplies, while training nurses in healing and others in defense. Anyone who could hold a sword or work a bow was drafted into the defense army. Eowyn herself kept up her practice on the training field, although I, as my pregnancy advanced, found myself slowing down.

Only on the training field did Eowyn appear to relax, her fire and confidence restored until she looked like the queen she was always meant to be. There, on that muddy bit of ground, dressed in dirty, unflattering divided skirts, and wielding a sword like she had been born with it in her hand, she seemed the most herself.

“I don’t want to wait for the enemy,” she said privately to me once, in a sudden fit of impatience. “I want to find him and stop him where he is.”

I understood, but there was little do be done about it. What little I could do, I did with Felim. Once we knew that he would not be going with the army, I told him of a private project that needed doing. He seemed skeptical at first, especially when I told him that it was not to be mentioned to anyone, not even Eowyn.

“It’ll take time and material away,” he said. “Are you sure it’s worth the risk?”

Early on, Eowyn had issued an edict, declaring certain materials were not to be used for private means without severe consequences. I thought I knew where we could get the material where it would not be missed. In any case, so sure was I in my purpose that I was willing to risk imprisonment to see it through.

“It *must* be done,” I insisted. “And it won’t be done if we ask for permission.”

I’d married well, for he relented and began the work.

Life on the defensive is tedious and stressful. We lived for word from the front, even as we dreaded the possibilities. When a group of riders appeared on the horizon one day, we were initially terrified. It was Eowyn who identified them.

“It is the Grey Riders,” she said, her grey eyes shining. “Aragorn returns!”

Before we could respond, she rushed to change into one of her best frocks, a white garment that made her radiance even brighter.

Aragorn rode in with his usual odd company. They were weary and worn, but not defeated and welcomed the opportunity to break bread among friends. Eowyn made no attempt to conceal her pleasure at seeing the Ranger again – he had to have been blind not to note her regard. But blind he must have been, for he gave her not the slightest encouragement.

The Grey Riders made for pleasant, lively company and it was from them that we learned of the victory at Hornburg, in Helm’s Deep. Eowyn listened with breathless excitement at the heroics of her brother and guardian, and I could see that the itch to leave grew with each detail. She was relieved and happy as we all were to know that Theoden and Eomer were safe. She was less pleased when she learned of Aragorn’s destination: the Paths of the Dead.



The news struck us all like a death knell. There are places too dangerous for even the noblest of warriors to venture and the Paths of the Dead was so highly feared that some thought even to mention the name was to bring a curse down on the speaker's head.

Eowyn's expression was stone. "Is it then your errand to seek death?" she demanded. "They do not suffer the living to pass."

"They may suffer me to pass," he said, quietly. "No other road will serve."

It was a clash of two wills of equal strength. Eowyn was adamant and he would not be swayed. Finally the elf and the dwarf intervened and turned the conversation. The matter was not finished, however; I could tell from Eowyn's expression that she had more to say. Later, after the feast was over and the men had taken themselves to their quarters, Eowyn disappeared.

I could guess where she had gone. I slipped out of the hall and ran down to the hut I shared with my ageing father and my husband. Felim was there, asleep in his chair, waiting for me. He awoke to my touch.

"The riders leave in the morning," I said. "Can you finish tonight?"

I was asking a great deal. Felim had put in a full day's hard labor and this was no easy task for a man alone. But by then, he had come to accept that it was, indeed, important.

"I can," he said and good man that he was, stood, ready to begin.

"I'll return as soon as I can to help," I promised.

I would have gone with him then, but instinct drew me back to Meduseld, to Eowyn's private chamber. I waited with her maid until the Lady of Rohan returned. From her stiff manner, pallor, and the humiliation in her eyes, we knew all was not well.

"Are you all right?" I asked, going to her side.

But she was in no mood to be comforted. She brushed off my gesture and turned her back.

"I offered," she said. "And I was refused. I would be alone now."

Her voice broke. She, Eowyn of Rohan, been refused and the pain was cruel.

We did as she requested. I do not know how she passed the night, but I know how I did: In the foundry with my husband, working and etching until dawn touched the sky.

The Grey Riders were mounted and ready to leave before the sun even crested the ridges to the east. Whatever drove Aragorn on the foolish quest to the Paths of the Dead, it filled him with an eagerness that belied the occasion. Not many had assembled to see them off – the perceived recklessness of their venture filled most with superstitious fear. As for myself, I was present for two reasons: I did not fear the dead so much as the living and I wanted to be there for Eowyn.

I was tired and dirty from my night's work, so I stood at a distance. When Aragorn made to mount his horse, I thought, *she isn't coming*.

But then Eowyn appeared, head held high, shoulders back, defiance and grace radiating out of every move. Yet she was not dressed as the Lady of Rohan. She wore the garments of a rider, right down to the battered old sword that we used for practice. I wondered if she'd had time to sharpen it.

"Aragorn," she said and I could hear the tears in her voice. "Wilt thou go?"

"I will," he said.

He was a stone of a man and I hated him for what he could do to my friend. I hated him more when she threw herself on her knees, the proud Lady of Rohan, begging this itinerant Ranger to take her with him, only to be refused again. Her humiliation was mine. I wished the curses of the Paths were true, even as I watched him raise her to her feet and reverently kiss her hand. The anger that seized me was temporary and sympathetic, but it would not abate until the Ranger and his men had disappeared from view.

Eowyn watched them go, a stone maiden with clenched fists, waiting until they were gone. Then she turned and I caught a brief glimpse of her face and the tears streaming down her cheeks. She stumbled into the house and I let her go to grieve in private.

Though I spent the day in my hut, sleeping, I got little rest. My dreams were of Sauron and of battling warriors, surrounded and drowning in a spreading, smothering darkness. I awoke with my heart pounding to find the hut empty and that night had fallen. I fell back against the pillow and lay still, listening to cricket song. My child moved within me and I wondered what sort of a world I'd be bringing her into.

I heard the jingling sounds of harness and the soft clop of muffled hooves long before the



knock at the door. When I opened it, Eowyn stood before me, holding the reins to her favorite mount. She was dressed as a ranger, her fair hair rolled and tucked so tightly to her head that at a distance she might be taken as a man. I knew from her stance, from the very look in her eyes, that she was going even before I spotted the packs on the horse's back.

"I'm leaving, Maebh," she said. "I ride out tonight."

I nodded, instinctively stroking my swollen belly. "To the Paths of the Dead?"

"Nay. To Theoden and Eomer." She hastily added, "The house of Rohan is in shame, Maebh, and the world grows dark and cold. I am the daughter of the House of Eorl. I cannot stand by and let the world fall. I will not."

"And you think that they shall not simply send you home again?"

She flinched, but raised her chin. "They may try," she said.

I nodded. It seemed that our entire lives had been mere staging to bring us to this

point, when the Shield Maiden assumed her true role. For a moment, I wondered if I, too, ought to go. Then my child moved and I was reminded of other, more personal obligations. My role, the one I had joyfully assumed long ago, was still here in Edoras.

"I leave Jereth in command," Eowyn said, her hands nervously running through the reins. "I've left no duty undone."

"No one dare say so in my presence," I said. "But a knight should not leave without her armor."

I opened the door wider and her eyes grew round, for there in the middle of the room was the finished product of Felim's and my labor. There was suit of mail with a breastplate, both slender and delicate enough to fit her frame, yet strong enough for war. We'd created a helmet and a shield as well, both etched to match.

The pride of all was the sword: light and strong, sized to her hand and arm strength. When Eowyn unsheathed it, it glinted even in the dull light of my room. It was a lovely blade – sharp as a razor and, though it was a folly, I'd etched delicate designs upon the blade.

Eowyn stared at the sword as though it were the most marvelous thing she'd ever seen.

"I ordered that all metals were to be used for the war effort," she said at last.

"And so these will be," I replied. "You were always destined for the battlefield, my lady. This cage was always only temporary."

She looked at me then and her grey eyes filled. I turned away, for if she cried, I would too. I think we both knew, somehow, that this parting was permanent – she would never again return to rule at Edoras. But the present parting was painful enough without adding the weight of years.

Silently we dressed her in her new armaments and strapped the sword to her side. They fit well – I was, after all, my lady's seamstress. I followed her out into the night and stood by as she strapped the helmet onto her pack.

"I'll go as Dernhelm," she said. "No one will know me."

"And let no man turn you away," I added.

Her eyes glinted in the moonlight. She took both of my hands and I forced a smile.

"Bring honor back to our house, lady," I said. "Strike a blow for your fellow Shield Maiden. My only wish is that I could come with you."

Eowyn seem to choke on words. She squeezed my hands hard and mounted her horse. She pulled the sword and it shone strong and new in the moonlight.

"I dub thee Maebh," she said of the sword and looked at me. "And thus, your name shares in the coming glory. I'll carry both you and Theodred with me." She paused and then said, "You were my teacher and my friend. I will never forget either service."

The lump in my throat made it almost impossible to speak. "The honor was mine, my lady."

A noise from behind alerted us to people approaching. With a final smile towards me, Eowyn drew her dark cloak across her shoulders and disappeared into the night.

And thus, rode she into legend. Maebh was shattered at the Battle of Pellenor Fields, slaying the Witch-King of Angmar, the one of whom it was said no man could kill. Thus was honor restored to Rohan and the House of Eorl, and I able to tell my growing brood that their father and mother did their bit to free the world from darkness.

On Theoden's death, Eomer became king, but Eowyn never really returned to Edoras. She married Faromir, a man nearly as fine as Felim, and left with him for his kingdom. When she did visit, with their young son in tow, I saw that she'd grown again, from an impatient, powerful warrior to a queen and mother. The role suited her just as well. On seeing me, she grabbed both of my hands and her grey eyes filled.

"Maebh," she said. "My teacher, sword-bearer, and friend."

I cannot conceive of a higher honor than that.

There are moments, when I see youngsters working on the training fields or my own daughters wrestling in the mud, and I think back with fondness and certain melancholy to my childhood friend. Gandalf once said that we all have our small parts to play. I like to think that my sword and shield saved Eowyn from death and maybe that was so. But in any case, though my part was small indeed, I account myself the luckiest of women for having played it.





**TWO SIDES
OF
WOMANLY BEAUTY**

By hannah vincent



here is a balance and difference within the world, sometimes subtle, sometimes extremely apparent. For instance, the sun and moon – both needed to light up the sky and illuminate creation, but seen at opposite ends of the day and with temperature changes. Rain and snow – they both can possess a gentleness but fierceness as well, and both can hydrate the land but destroy it if there's an overabundance. There are two sides to most everything in the world, and one distinct creature is a woman. (including the female gender.) Woman can embody many attitudes, feelings, and ideals. Her moods can change like the ocean: one minute beautiful and captivating, the next intimidating and perilous. She can love and begrudge, forgive and demand. Woman fights, endures, believes, and amidst her struggles, rests in her femininity. J.R.R Tolkien captures the essence of womanhood within his main female protagonists, Arwen and Eowyn, in his series, *The Lord of the Rings*.



Arwen, the half-elven maiden who falls in love with Aragorn, is one side of the female coin. She is a gentle, quiet soul who reminds readers and viewers of what a medieval introvert would be like, to put it in modern terms. She exudes beauty and grace with her luscious raven hair, innocent eyes, and milky complexion. Arwen is a devoted daughter and loves her father with unselfishness and sincerity. She takes pride in her elfin nature, and is subsequently torn for her love for Aragorn. She chooses love over everything, including immortality, which she possessed until deciding to be with Aragorn. To give up a deathless life in order to be with the man she loves is a sign of what is most important in life: to be with the person who fills the hole in your heart and matches the other half of your soul. Arwen symbolizes the purity found in the innermost being of a woman – to be selfless and a reflection of God's love for humanity. All of Arwen's traits, as modest and tender as they are, are every bit as needed in the nature of woman as her fighting side.



owyn, shield maiden of Rohan, makes up the other side of the woman's coin. Eowyn hides like many women – not in the physical sense, but in the emotional sense. She despises when others see her vulnerability and weaknesses. Should light catch hold of them, Eowyn pulls them back into herself and bolts the door on her heart. Her understanding is that in order to remain strong and courageous, her fears must be hidden. Only very carefully does Eowyn open herself up to those she trusts unwaveringly. She desires to prove herself and fight for what she believes in, and will not back down easily. As devoted to her uncle as Arwen is to her father, Eowyn joins King Theoden in battle at Minas Tirith, disguised as a man. While not striving or seeking the adulation of men, Eowyn simply wishes to fight for her people and homeland. When her uncle's life is forfeit, Eowyn bravely faces the Witch-king of Angmar despite the impossibility of her victory. As the Witch-king boasts that no living man can kill him, Eowyn whips off her helmet, revealing her glorious, long blond hair. "I am no man!" she declares, killing the Witch-king with one blow. She revels in her femininity, proclaiming it to the world.



hile some readers and viewers might be tempted to say Arwen was a weak character and Eowyn was the stronger and more important, that is far from true. Not every woman can be an Arwen, and not every woman can be an Eowyn. In reality, each woman has a combination of the two. One personality might be more conspicuous than the other, but Tolkien purposefully created two distinct characters to embody the nature of woman. Arwen fought for her people by inspiring Aragorn to aid in leading the Fellowship and remain strong in the fight for his crown, to pursue goodness, truth, and beauty despite a world darkened by evil. Arwen is the delicate balance to the roughness of men, a soothing reminder of hope and love. Eowyn, however, calls us to be battle ready and prepare to meet the darkness of the world head-on. We can be vulnerable (as she learns to be), because that is how we trust. If we are to have any peace, we need to trust one another. Woman's identity goes soul deep and her femininity is an inspiration, comfort, and hope for the world, just as Arwen and Eowyn were beacons of hope for Middle Earth.

Another Magical Ring

by Amanda Pizzolatto

Frodo wandered near the base of Mount Doom. He didn't really want to be here, but going to Cirith Ungol was worse. Sam was taking the others towards the pass so they could deal with Shelob. Frodo had gone with them partway, thinking he could manage it, but then they got to the orc base. He became too terrified to take another step. Aragon told him not to worry about it and that Sam could lead them the rest of the way. Gandalf told him to wait for them at the Black Gates before they left him to continue on. He had stood there, watching them go, until they disappeared behind the base. He didn't know how long he stood there watching, but he had to stop when an uncontrollable itch sprung up on his finger. He went to scratch it, and found only the stub of his finger. The itching vanished, but he still rubbed it. His hand went to the wound Shelob inflicted on him, then to where the Nazgul stabbed him, and then he wrapped his arms around himself. He finally turned and began walking away. He found himself standing at Mount Doom instead of the gates, but looking at it now that the lava had cooled, it didn't seem too bad. It seemed the land was going to get more healing than he ever would.

He meandered near where the stairs had once been, the side of the mountain nothing but dried lava. He was glad of that; no one could reenter it to make another ring of power. He glanced in the direction of Cirith Ungol. His friends hadn't emerged yet, but with a spider of that size, it was going to take a while, provided no one got hurt, or worse, killed. Frodo shuddered, recalling vividly his encounter with the giant spider. An itchy finger brought his attention back to the present. Again, he found only his stump. He clenched his teeth as he rubbed it. He hated feeling things that weren't there, whether an itch during the day or the distinct sensation of someone biting it off in the middle of the night; he just wished it would stop. He let out a breath as a thought came to him. Maybe it would pass away with time; it had only been a couple of weeks since the destruction of the Ring. Perhaps he had to give his finger more time. Or at least, he needed more time to get used to having a stub instead of a finger.

He rubbed his stub again as he glanced at the Black Gate. Maybe he should start heading that way. Gandalf did tell him to wait for them at the Black Gate, and yet his feet retraced his steps to Mount Doom. He didn't know why, but here he was. He kicked a rock, and paused.



Something gold glittered in the sunlight. He gulped, but he bent down to dig it out. He gasped as his eyes widened in shock and a twinge of fear. It was a gold ring with fiery symbols engraved around it. He calmed his racing heart down; the letters didn't look like they were in the black Tongue. Frodo instead had the distinct feeling of sitting by a fire on a chilly night. A much better feeling than what the Ring had always given him. But, where had it come from? And what did the letters mean? He rubbed it thoughtfully. Maybe Gandalf might know, or at least be able to find out. He stuck the ring in his pocket and began walking towards the Black Gate.

"Where do you think you're going?" said a snarly voice. Frodo gasped as he came face to face with a couple of orcs. He blanched – he had no weapons!

"Well, where are you going?" said the other orc.

"Out, out of here," said Frodo, his voice coming out almost a squeak.

"What were you doing in here in the first place?" snarled the first orc as he unsheathed a nasty blade.

Frodo gulped. What should he say? If he told them where the others were, they might attack with surprise and kill a couple of his friends. Then again, Legolas might not be caught by surprise and take them out.

"Well?" said the orc, bringing his blade closer towards Frodo.

"Oh, I, um ..." Frodo began to subconsciously rub the ring. What should he say? What could he say?

"Your time's almost up," said the orc. "You have one second to tell me, or I'll ..." A blast of smoke startled the three and sent them sprawling on the ground. Frodo covered his head and squeezed his eyes shut as the orcs shrieked, "What, what are you?"

"I am an ifrit, and that is my master. You will not harm him."

Frodo slowly opened his eyes and raised his head. His mouth dropped in shock and a bit of awe at the figure that now stood between him and the orcs. It was a blazing fire in the shape of a man, with clothes made from smoke and shoes made from lava. Frodo let out a gasp, and the ifrit looked at him. Frodo could see that his eyes were each a blue flame.

"Do not be afraid, little master. I will not, and cannot, harm you. I obey your every word."

Frodo gulped. Well, this was completely different from the one Ring. That Ring belonged to a fiery being that wanted Frodo to bend to its will, and he did. This ring had a fiery creature that seemed to want to bend to Frodo's will.

"Do you not believe me?"

Frodo glanced at the ifrit, realizing with a start that it no longer seemed like he was facing a large wildfire or a stream of lava, but that of a cozy fire by the hearth. It was gentle and comforting to look into those eyes.

"I, I believe you," whispered Frodo.

The ifrit nodded before turning back to the orcs.

“We, we weren’t going to harm him! Honest!”

“He would not have called on me if you were not,” the ifrit said, crossing his arms.

“Right, uh, we’ll, uh, just be going now, sorry to have disturbed you, little fella.”

The orcs chuckled nervously as they backed away. They turned and ran off.

Frodo gasped when he saw the direction they were taking. “Cirith Ungol!”

The ifrit glanced at him. “What of it?”

“My friends are there! Though, it is just the two. Legolas could take them out easily.”

“Legolas?”

“Oh, uh, he’s an elf.”

“Ah, then yes, he could.” The ifrit turned back towards the retreating orcs.

“What are they doing there?”

Frodo let out a sigh. “They’re, they’re destroying a giant spider.”

“Why are you not with them?”

“Oh, well, I ... I was attacked by the spider two weeks ago, and I couldn’t go back in.”

“Understandable. Some wounds need more time to heal than others.”

Frodo glanced at him in surprise before glancing at his hand. “I, I suppose so.”

“Master ...”

“Yes?” Frodo glanced up at the ifrit and saw that the hearth fire had become a blazing wildfire.

“There are more orcs heading towards this ... Cirith Ungol.”

Frodo glanced towards the Black Gate as more than a dozen orcs marched on the path that would inevitably take them towards the orc base, and where his friends would come out. “No!”

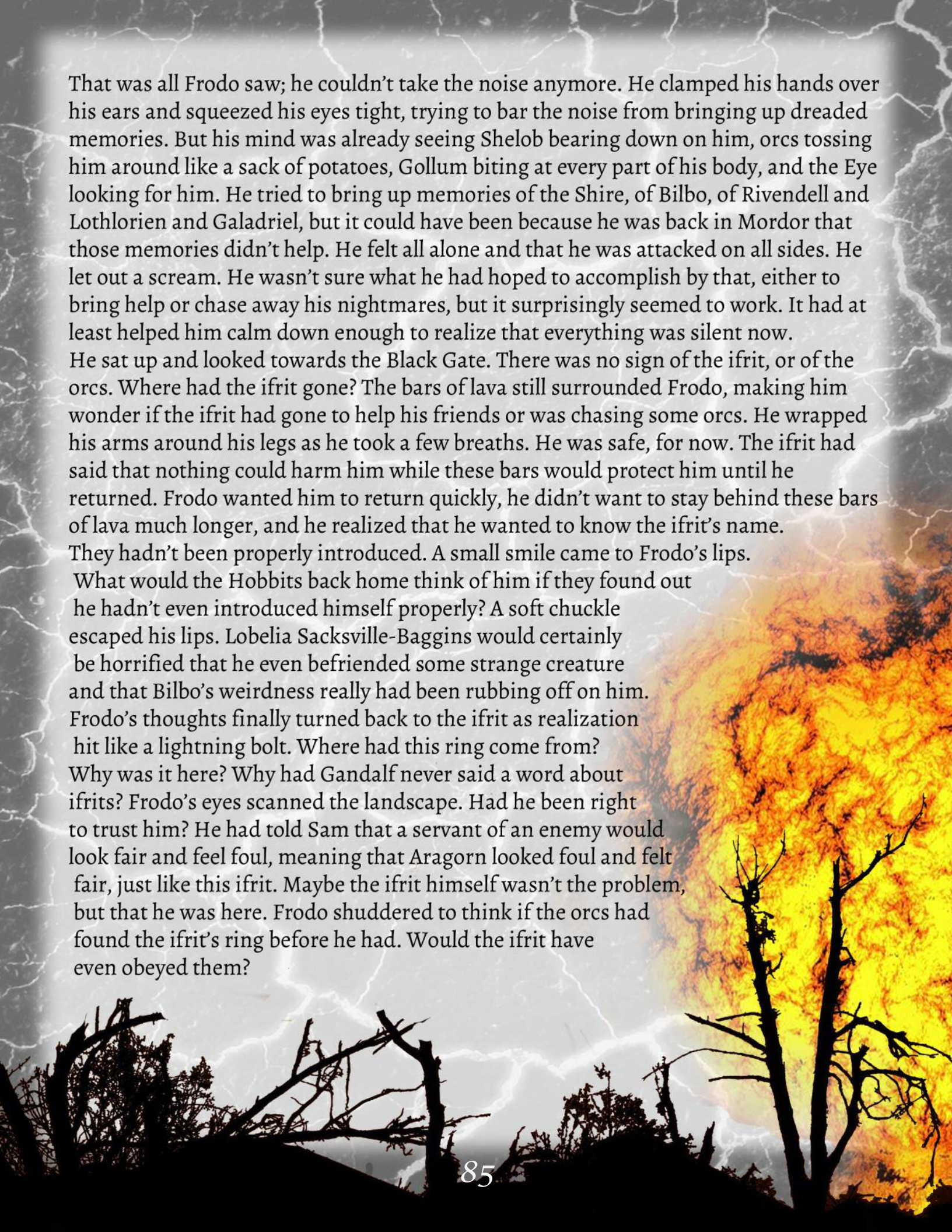
“Shall I stop them?”

“Yes, please!”

“Stay here,” said the ifrit as he pulled up bars of lava around Frodo. “This will protect you until I return.”

“But, wait!”

The ifrit had already taken off, becoming nothing more than a blazing ball of fire as he raced towards the orc patrol. The orcs heard him before he arrived and began firing arrows at him, but since he was nothing but fire, those arrows merely passed through him, though coming out ablaze. The orcs screamed and shrieked as the ball of fire descended upon them. The ifrit turned back into the form of a man and began spewing fire everywhere.



That was all Frodo saw; he couldn't take the noise anymore. He clamped his hands over his ears and squeezed his eyes tight, trying to bar the noise from bringing up dreaded memories. But his mind was already seeing Shelob bearing down on him, orcs tossing him around like a sack of potatoes, Gollum biting at every part of his body, and the Eye looking for him. He tried to bring up memories of the Shire, of Bilbo, of Rivendell and Lothlorien and Galadriel, but it could have been because he was back in Mordor that those memories didn't help. He felt all alone and that he was attacked on all sides. He let out a scream. He wasn't sure what he had hoped to accomplish by that, either to bring help or chase away his nightmares, but it surprisingly seemed to work. It had at least helped him calm down enough to realize that everything was silent now. He sat up and looked towards the Black Gate. There was no sign of the ifrit, or of the orcs. Where had the ifrit gone? The bars of lava still surrounded Frodo, making him wonder if the ifrit had gone to help his friends or was chasing some orcs. He wrapped his arms around his legs as he took a few breaths. He was safe, for now. The ifrit had said that nothing could harm him while these bars would protect him until he returned. Frodo wanted him to return quickly, he didn't want to stay behind these bars of lava much longer, and he realized that he wanted to know the ifrit's name. They hadn't been properly introduced. A small smile came to Frodo's lips. What would the Hobbits back home think of him if they found out he hadn't even introduced himself properly? A soft chuckle escaped his lips. Lobelia Sackville-Baggins would certainly be horrified that he even befriended some strange creature and that Bilbo's weirdness really had been rubbing off on him. Frodo's thoughts finally turned back to the ifrit as realization hit like a lightning bolt. Where had this ring come from? Why was it here? Why had Gandalf never said a word about ifrits? Frodo's eyes scanned the landscape. Had he been right to trust him? He had told Sam that a servant of an enemy would look fair and feel foul, meaning that Aragorn looked foul and felt fair, just like this ifrit. Maybe the ifrit himself wasn't the problem, but that he was here. Frodo shuddered to think if the orcs had found the ifrit's ring before he had. Would the ifrit have even obeyed them?

“Are you all right?”

Frodo let out a yelp as he jumped. To his right was a dwarf, her copper eyes looking at him in concern. Her brown hair was pulled up into a bun, probably to keep it from blowing in the wind and getting caught on fire in the lava bars.

“I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to frighten you!”

Frodo let out a nervous chuckle. “No, I’m sorry. I get so deep in thought that I don’t pay attention to my surroundings.”

“Oh, I see.” The dwarf paused as she seemed to scrutinize him. “Where’s the ifrit?”

Frodo blinked. “What?”

“The ifrit, as a matter of fact, the ring too. Only an ifrit can make this,” she said, indicating the lava bars.

“Oh, um, the ifrit is defending my friends, I think. I asked him to destroy a patrol of orcs, and I haven’t seen him since.”

“Oh, really?” said the dwarf. “And I assume you have the ring?”

Frodo nodded. “Yes, I found it underneath this lava.”

The dwarf nodded. “Makes sense, ifrits are attracted to warmer climates and volcanoes.”

“Right.” There was a slight pause. Frodo cleared his throat. Um, may I ask a question?”

The dwarf glanced at him and blinked. “Uh, I guess?”

“Well, actually more like a few questions but, um, what are you and the ifrit doing here? This is Mordor!”

The dwarf blinked. “Uh, Mordor?”

Frodo looked at her in shock. “You’ve never heard of Mordor?”

The dwarf shook her head slowly. “This is Sauron’s country!”

The dwarf blinked, clearly becoming more and more confused . “Sauron? Who’s he?”

“He was one of the most powerful evils to have ever walked Middle-earth! How could you not know of him?”

The dwarf gasped. “This isn’t Serad!”

Frodo looked at her in confusion. “What? Serad?”

“We came to a different planet!! But why?”

What in Yelwa’s name is going on?”

“What’s going on, Freylif?”

A female Hobbit with golden locks and emerald eyes, unusual colors for a Hobbit, appeared behind the dwarf.

Frodo’s eyes widened; she was as lovely as an elf.

“We’re not on Serad anymore, Fralla!”

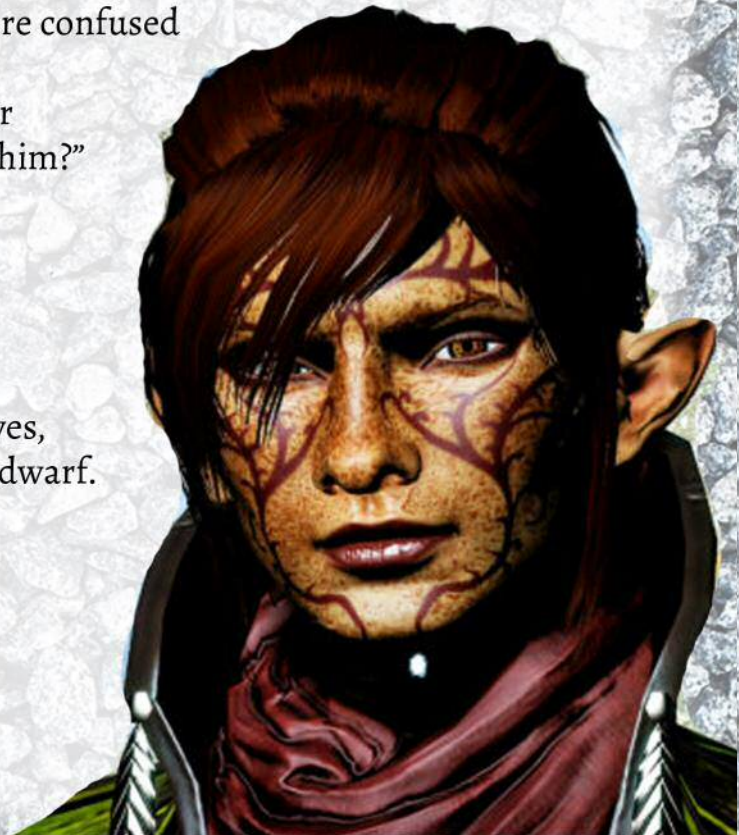
Fralla’s eyes widened. “What?”

“This hob was just telling me ...”

“Hobbit,” Frodo quickly corrected her.

The two glanced at him.

“What?” said Freylif.



“Hobbit,” Frodo said again, showing her his feet. The two gaped at him. He glanced at Fralla.

“You’re not a Hobbit?”

“What? Goodness, no! I’m a hob!” She lifted up her skirt to show that her feet were in shoes. Frodo stared in shock before glancing back at her face, and then he noticed how different her face really was and why she reminded him of an elf. Fralla had a sharper point to her ears, like an elf, a hooked nose, and an angular chin.

“A hobgoblin, to be exact,” said Freylif.

Fralla placed her hands on her hips. “Hey! We dropped the goblin part ages ago!”

Frodo glanced between them. “You, you really are from another world?”

The two chorused, “Yes!”

“And, and the ifrit?”

“Yes!”

“But, but how, how is this possible?”

Freylif crossed her arms. “That’s what I would like to know.”

“Sandor?” said Fralla.

Freylif shook her head. “He’s not that powerful, though he’d like us to think so.” Freylif then glanced at Frodo. “By the way, who are you?”

Frodo quickly introduced himself, giving them a bit of his story. The two also introduced themselves as Fralla Bixel and Freylif Thoskudi.

“My brother Muno is a merchant!” said Fralla with a hint of pride. “But he does have a knack for getting his nose into things he really shouldn’t and getting into a lot of trouble.”

“My brother’s a smith, and he’s joined sides with Sandor,” mumbled Freylif. Fralla patted the dwarf’s back reassuringly.

“Sandor?” said Frodo.

Freylif sighed. “Sandor is evil, and he wants to take over the world.”

“Sounds kind of like Sauron. And he’s looking for a ring?”

Freylif nodded. “All the rings with ifrits, to be exact. See, he thinks that if he can just bend them to his will, he’ll be able to take over the world much more effectively.”

“Ah, I see,” said Frodo. He took out the ring to show them. “All the more reason to keep this from him.”

Freylif nodded. “Exactly.”

Fralla let out a gasp. “Freylif! What if we let this ring stay here! Sandor can’t possibly get it then!”

Freylif’s mouth dropped. “That’s a great idea, Fralla! We could leave it here and ...”

“No.”

The three yelped and jumped, startled by the deep voice. Frodo noticed the ifrit right as he began to lower the bars.

“It would not be at good idea at all,” the ifrit continued as he finished lowering bars around Frodo.

“Why not?”

The ifrit glanced at Freylif once the last bar disappeared. Frodo could now move to wherever he wanted, and seemed to draw closer to Fralla as she got closer to him. “Each planet has a delicate ecosystem; moving one species from one planet to another is very disastrous.”

The three blinked in confusion. The ifrit sighed. "Each planet has specific plants and creatures that rely on each other to stay alive. Remove one plant or animal, and the planet could die."

"Oh," chorused the three.

The ifrit sighed, and then let out a soft chuckle. "You still do not fully understand, but in time, I'm sure you will."

"I certainly hope so," said Fralla, "it sounds interesting."

"Perhaps I may teach you."

Fralla smiled. "That's right, you can!" She turned to Frodo and held out her hand. "May I have the ring back?"

Frodo's eyes widened. "You're his ringbearer?"

Fralla nodded. "Oh, yes."

Frodo paused for a moment before saying softly, "Of course." He put the ring in her hand, but then held her hand in his. "May I, may I give you some advice?"

"If you wish," said Fralla, hesitantly.

"Carrying a ring with this much power won't be easy. There's a big chance you'll be hurt by those who want the power of this ring for themselves. But no matter what happens, or how hard it will get, keep on going. Some wounds will need lots of time to heal, others may not heal at all. Keep your friends close and don't trust appearances; they can easily deceive you."

Fralla smiled. "Thank you. I'll remember these words always." Frodo smiled back as he let go of her hand. She turned to her companions. "Shall we go?"

The two nodded, and the three began walking around the mountain.

"Oh! May I ask a question?"

The three paused and glanced at Frodo.

"Make it quick," said Freylif.

"What language is written on the ring, and what does it say?"

The ifrit chuckled. "It is written in *firle*, the language of the ifrits, and it reads, 'My name is Firan'."

Frodo smiled. "Thank you. And thank you for taking care of those orcs."

Firan bowed. "It was my pleasure. Good day, little master, may you live a long and happy life."

"Thank you. And good luck to all of you with Sandor."

"Thanks, we're definitely going to need that," said Freylif with a scoff.

Fralla waved. "Thanks! I wish you the best!"

"Thank you!"

The four went their separate ways – Fralla, Freylif, and Firan to the far side of the mountain and the portal that closed after they all made it back home, while Frodo went to the Black Gates. He lay down and took a nap while he waited for his friends, until he was woken up by Sam. They made their way back to Gondor. Gandalf eventually found out about the incident, after worming it out of Frodo, but Frodo never told another soul about it. It was the only good memory he would ever have about Mordor.





How Harry Healed My Inner Frodo: Reflections on the Christian Mystery of Love, Sacrifice, and Choice

By Michael Haldas

I first read and finished *The Lord of the Rings* in the summer of 1977. I remember feeling like someone had kicked me in the stomach. I remember feeling a depression wash over me, not just because of the sad, somewhat dystopic ending, but because it was such a great book I didn't want it to end. I had never encountered anything like it. I didn't know at that moment that this was the beginning of a lifelong love of *The Lord of the Rings* and all of Tolkien's works. I have reread *The Lord of the Rings* nearly annually since my first read more than forty years ago. *Harry Potter* came along a generation later and I was able to relive, to some extent, that same type of experience I had with *The Lord of the Rings* since it too was an exceptional piece of work.

Though very different books written in very different styles, they share many things in common. For me, they evoke an emotional response and a depth of feeling that transcend anything partisan lovers of either

work who want to divide the world between Tolkien and Rowling have to say. I hold Tolkien and his work in higher esteem and affection, but that does not take away from my love and enjoyment of the *Harry Potter* series.

Each work has many heroes. The central hero in *Harry Potter* is Harry Potter himself, and he remains the primary hero from the beginning to the end of the story. Frodo begins as the central hero, but fades as the book goes on and others such as Sam and Aragorn increase in heroic prominence. Yet, Frodo is still the central hero in that he bears the largest burden and sacrifices himself more than any other. Frodo's literary foil, the character whose qualities are in direct contrast to his, is not the Dark Lord Sauron. It is Gollum. Harry's literary foil is Rowling's version of the Dark Lord, that is, Voldemort. All four of these characters have something in common other than being heroes or villains. They are all *orphans* and

the love they receive or did not receive plays an interesting role or non-role in their characters.

Frodo was orphaned at twelve when his parents drowned in a boating accident. Harry was orphaned as a fifteen-month-old when Voldemort murdered his parents. Voldemort was orphaned at birth, his father having abandoned his mother when he realized she had tricked him into loving her through a love potion. His mother went to an orphanage, gave birth to Voldemort there and died within the hour. Gollum too was an orphan, though this is not so obvious. We know in *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien wrote about Gollum's family being governed by his grandmother who eventually expels him from the family after he became corrupted by the Ring. I had read *The Lord of the Rings* many times and never thought much about Gollum's parents or the possibility of him being an orphan. But in one of Tolkien's letters, he wrote about Gollum, "I imagine he was an orphan" (1).

Two of these orphans received love and two did not, yet they each responded differently. Frodo was lovingly adopted by his cousin Bilbo, whom he referred to as his uncle and was raised by him from the time he was twelve until he was thirty-three, which was when hobbits "come of age" and are considered adults. They had great love between them. There is no mention of Gollum's parents, but he was clearly part of a larger family and there is nothing to suggest he was not loved by his grandmother until such time as his behavior became unmanageable.

Interestingly, Gollum and Frodo both began ownership of the Ring at age thirty-three. It is actually in their initial ownership that we see a striking difference of character. Frodo loved Bilbo and though he knew about the Ring while growing up, he clearly did not care about it. He delighted in his cousin/uncle and did not want him to leave. He was surprised Bilbo even left him

the Ring.

Sméagol referred to his cousin Déagol as "my love", but clearly did not love him



enough and murdered him when the latter withheld the Ring. Aristotle once wrote, "We become what we are as persons by the decisions that we ourselves make." Rowling had Dumbledore echo the same sentiment when he told the twelve-year-old Harry, "It's our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities" (2). In Frodo and Sméagol's cases, it's their choices that define both hobbits and show, despite these striking similarities, how different they are.

Harry was loved deeply by his parents who sacrificed their lives for him when he was a baby, but he was then raised by his abusive aunt and uncle. Voldemort was simply never loved and here we come to a point about the mystery of love and what truths these works of literature, these stories, reveal about love. Tolkien told his story mainly through words and actions of the characters, only occasionally letting you into their private thoughts, such as Sam's internal debates when he believed Frodo had been killed by the great spider Shelob. We never get any thoughts or words from Frodo about his parents but we read and see his deep love for Bilbo and vice versa. But there is nothing to suggest his parents did not love him. Further, he had devoted cousins and friends in Merry, Pippin and Sam who loved him. So, we can pretty safely conclude he received great love in his formative years and beyond. This is in contrast Harry's upbringing. Harry certainly received love that he really

couldn't remember, since his parents died when he was only a little more than a year old, but we know that his mother's sacrifice left a mark of love and protection on him. But he spent the next decade being essentially berated and mentally abused by his hostile aunt and uncle.

Frodo receives great love and demonstrates capacity for love. We see this in his nearly immediate reaction when he learns the truth about the Ring. His reaction is one of love as he decides to leave the Shire, his home that he loves, to protect it from evil by taking the Ring away from it so Sauron will not focus on it, but rather pursue him. Harry, too, repeatedly demonstrates his love for others by his courage and genuine desire to save others despite the danger it poses to himself. Hermione even tells him later in *The Order of the Phoenix* that he has a "saving people thing." In Frodo and Harry we have two characters, one who received love, and one who bears a stamp of love, but received nothing but abuse and neglect. With Frodo it makes sense that he was loving and sacrificial because that was modeled for him. For Harry, it was not modeled. What was modeled was quite the opposite. Dumbledore even marveled later in the story when he told Harry that it was amazing that Harry never lost his capacity to love despite the pain and suffering he endured.

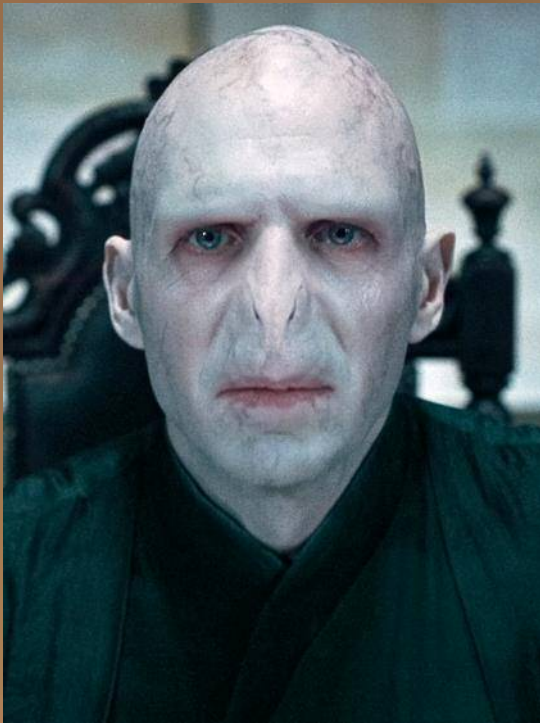
We see a similar mystery in Christ's love for His Disciples. For three years he trained and loved them. We know very little to nothing about their family backgrounds, but eleven of them responded to Christ's sacrificial love and, in turn, grew in their faith and modeled the same sacrificial love. One, Judas, did not. Yet he had every opportunity to be like the rest. Christ tried to save him up until the end, offering him the bread and cup at the last supper, still seeking to redeem him. This is a point Tolkien mirrors with Frodo seeking Gollum's redemption. Rowling mirrors this in her work, as well, when Harry tries to redeem Voldemort during their final

confrontation. And here is the mystery. What was it about Judas that made him close off his heart and reject Christ? He had a character flaw when it came to money, according to the Gospel of John. Was that a brief glimpse into the man that points to why he closed his heart to Christ even after seeing and experiencing everything Christ did for three years to include miracles?

In his remorse, rooted in self-absorption like Cain, Judas kills himself rather than repenting and seeking Christ out for forgiveness. It is the same with Cain, in that we do not know why he allowed himself to be mastered by sin, yet Abel did not. Tolkien gives us a bit of the Cain and Abel flavor with Gollum and Frodo. Even before Sméagol, who becomes Gollum, finds the Ring and murders his cousin Déagol to keep it, we learn that his tendencies and character were not exemplary. Tolkien writes through the character of Gandalf, who recounts the story to Frodo of Gollum finding the Ring that "his head and his eyes were downward," clearly letting us, the readers, know Sméagol is already going in the wrong direction (3). Tolkien also writes in letter number 214 that Déagol was a "mean little soul" and Sméagol was "meaner and greedier" (4). This is of course prior to them finding the Ring. There was something about Sméagol, something in him like Judas that caused him not to look upward, not to avail himself of the light so to speak, but to choose the dark. Something he couldn't get past, or chose not to get past.

Voldemort, perhaps, is easy to explain. He never received love and therefore never understood it, which is what led to his downfall. Dumbledore asks Harry, when showing Harry Voldemort's pitiable past in the Pensieve, if now that he knows what he knows, did he feel sorry for Voldemort. Harry, due to his capacity for love, does. Voldemort seems like a classic sociopath in many ways, being devoid of feelings beyond those for himself and lacking a sense of basic morality.

Yet, many people in real life have faced worse circumstances than the fictional



Voldemort and have risen above it to be able to both receive and give love. What is Rowling trying to say – that the stamp of sacrificial love Harry received was enough to give him the capacity to retain his ability to love? That Voldemort received a stamp of abandonment and neglect, and was essentially discarded, and thus could not love? What is Tolkien trying to say with his characters and their intrinsic differences despite both receiving love?

I think the only safe conclusion to draw in exploring these fictional stories and fictional characters, as teachers of our reality when viewed through a Christian lens, is that it is indeed a mystery why some rise above their circumstance and some sink below them. Why some accept Christ and God's love, while others reject them like Judas. It is a mystery of the human heart. We do see *this* truth, though, in both works: the truth of dying to self as Christ instructs, to gain our true selves and set us on the path to growth where we find our lives – the abundant life in Him that He promises – because we are willing to lose our lives, the lives we cling to on our own terms.

Frodo and Harry were self-sacrificial, which led to their growth, and Voldemort and Gollum were self-absorbed, which led to their destruction. There's something else about these stories and the two characters of Frodo and Harry that draw us to these stories as well. In their fictional lives, we somewhat see the stories of the saints we venerate. Frodo and Harry achieved a level of spiritual growth, though neither Tolkien, a devout Christian, and Rowling, a self-confessed struggling Christian – at least she seemed to be at one point and maybe still is – overtly address religion.

Early in the story, after Frodo has been through some trials but has many more ahead of him, Gandalf ruminates, speculating that Frodo will “become like a glass filled with clear light for eyes to see that can” (5). Frodo suffers greatly but grows in wisdom as the story evolves. He becomes a pacifist by the end, a person of peace, broken in body in many ways, and deeply wounded in spirit – the suffering servant who sacrifices himself utterly to defeat evil.

Harry too suffers and grows. He nearly dies and has a heavenly experience in a heavenly version of King's Cross train station – the symbolism of this taking place in King's Cross is unmistakable. While his body lies in a near death state, Voldemort, thinking he is dead, gleefully and mercilessly use the *Cruciatis* curse, the torture curse, to inflict more humiliation on Harry, but Harry can't feel it even though he is aware Voldemort is doing it to him. He is immune to it now, having risen above Voldemort's ability to harm him. In their final conflict, when Harry reveals himself alive and well to a shocked Voldemort, he even begs the Dark Lord to show remorse – trying to save him, much like Christ did with Judas. Voldemort, like Sauron who placed a substantial part of his being in the Ring so he could dominate others, had previously maimed his soul to preserve his life, placing piece of his soul in Horcruxes so could never die unless the Horcruxes were



destroyed. Rowling reveals earlier in the story that the only possible way to repair your soul after indulging in such dark magic – which involved murder – was to begin with genuine remorse.

Frodo too tried to redeem Gollum. He showed Gollum genuine care, pitying him, and doing his best to be kind to him in hopes of reaching his heart. In what is among the most tragic moments in the story, Gollum is actually wavering, poised to genuinely repent, and reaches out to caress Frodo when Sam unwittingly wakes up, and thinking he is threatening Frodo, lashes out at him, causing Gollum to retreat back into himself. Tolkien describes it as a moment beyond recall. We see in Frodo's saintliness a form of martyrdom. He is too broken and wounded at the end of the story to return to his life. He must leave the land he saved and go into the West, to the Blessed Realm where normally mortals could not go, to gain peace and find healing. Yet, most everyone around him is not broken but whole because of his efforts; Sam, Gandalf, Aragorn, Merry, Pippin, Legolas, Gimli, Éowyn, Éomer, Faramir and so on, essentially end up better off than they were. The story ends with the very sad and bitter sweet parting of Frodo from his beloved fellow hobbits.

Harry is not martyr, but like Frodo is a savior. He survives, not broken but whole. But unlike Frodo, there is much brokenness and death around him. The Weasley's have lost their son Fred, and their other sons George and Bill suffer maiming wounds. Dumbledore, Dobby, Lupin, Tonks, Sirius, little Colin Creevy and so many more were killed. Yet, the main impact of the stories channel through Frodo and Harry. Harry's story ends in an epilogue with him reflecting how the scar, given to him when Voldemort tried to kill him as an infant, has not pained him in nineteen years and how, and I quote Rowling echoing Julian of Norwich, "All was well."

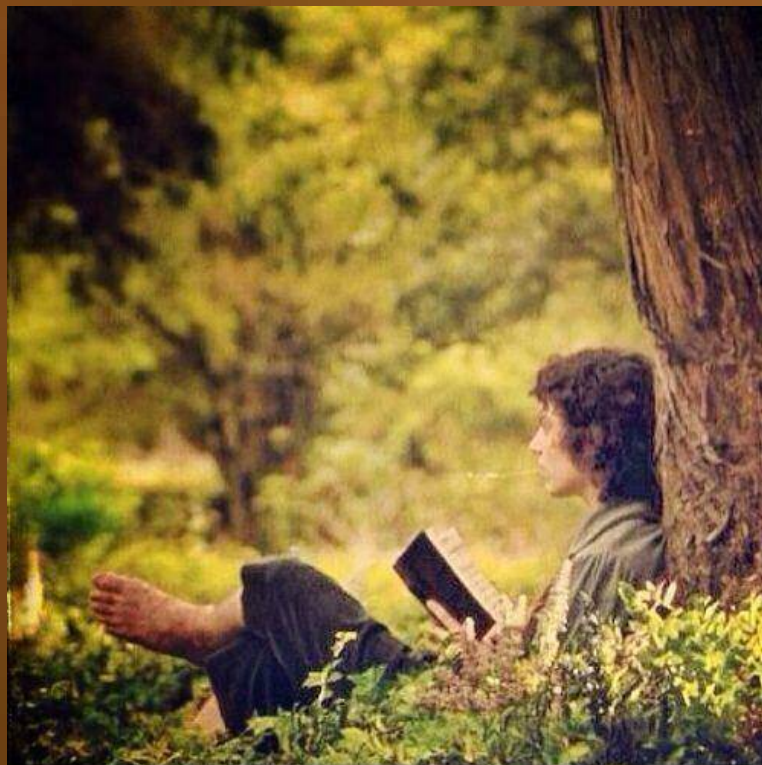
Frodo and Harry are like James and John. Both Tolkien and Rowling hint at providence being a mover behind the scenes of the story. Tolkien pretty directly, Rowling less so. Christ chose both James and John as disciples. James died a martyr, John lived a long life and died at a very old age. So it is with all of the saints. Some are martyred, some live a long life, many of them suffer, but some do not.

I tend to reread *The Lord of the Rings* in the Fall and Winter, and Harry Potter in the Spring. I think it is a direct reflection of the ending of the stories. One reminds me of the lingering yet joyful sadness we all face in this

life, reflected in the both the beauty of autumn even though things are dying, and the somberness and starkness and beauty of winter. And one reminds of me of the rebirth and joy that comes with spring. To me, *The Lord of the Rings* seems to go with the Nativity/Christmas season and Harry Potter with the Easter/Pascha season. When I do reread, reading Harry Potter in the Spring is always an antidote to the impact *The Lord of the Rings* makes on me. I identify with Frodo much more in my inner self, and Harry Potter with its happier ending, heals my inner Frodo. Maybe those of you who love these stories have similar reactions. We all know one day it will be our time to sail into the West, yet because of Christ we know all will be and is well.

Citations:

- (1) Humphrey Carpenter, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, Houghton Mifflin, 2000, Letter 214, p. 292
- (2) J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Scholastic Inc., 1999, p. 333.
- (3) J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Houghton Mifflin, 1954-5, 1965-6, pp. 51-52
- (4) Humphrey Carpenter, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, Houghton Mifflin, 2000, Letter 214, p. 292
- (5) J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Houghton Mifflin, 1954-5, 1965-6, p.217



TOLKIEN WAS WISE TO PUT THE KIBOSH ON THE FOURTH AGE

By Kevin Derby

One of the most amazing things about *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien is how many readers return to it time and time again. Most doorstopper-sized books, no matter how wonderful, are read once and promptly shoved on bookshelves to serve as something of a trophy. Samuel Johnson's take on Milton holds true of many tomes. "*Paradise Lost* is one of the books which the reader admires and lays down, and forgets to take up again," Johnson wrote. "None ever wished it longer than it is."

The same could be said of many other books but not about Tolkien's masterpiece. Tolkien was shrewd enough to give readers a satisfying – if melancholy – conclusion while offering hints of the future. Readers are left with questions, many of which Tolkien doesn't answer in the various appendixes.

Tolkien was sharp enough not to go too deep into the Fourth Age despite writing a handful of pages when he considered doing a sequel. *The New Shadow* would have been set decades after Sauron's defeat and there were hints of a growing cult in Gondor, including children playing "orc games" and even destroying trees. Frankly, it sounds like it would have been awful and Tolkien did the right thing by pulling the plug on it. He simply did not have much more to say about Middle-earth after the ring-bearers sailed out from the Grey Havens.

This is near unthinkable today where publishers and studios seem to want to launch series and universes before the first book or movie is even released. With blockbuster films costing so much to create, studios are increasingly growing more cautious, which leads to endless arrays of sequels. That being the case, there are still risks, even with the most beloved and established franchises. Witness last year's *Solo: A Star Wars Story*, the first time a movie set a long, long time ago in a galaxy far, far away bombed. Even the Pottermore seems to be losing its magic as *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* brought in less than any other movie in the series and garnered jeers from the critics.

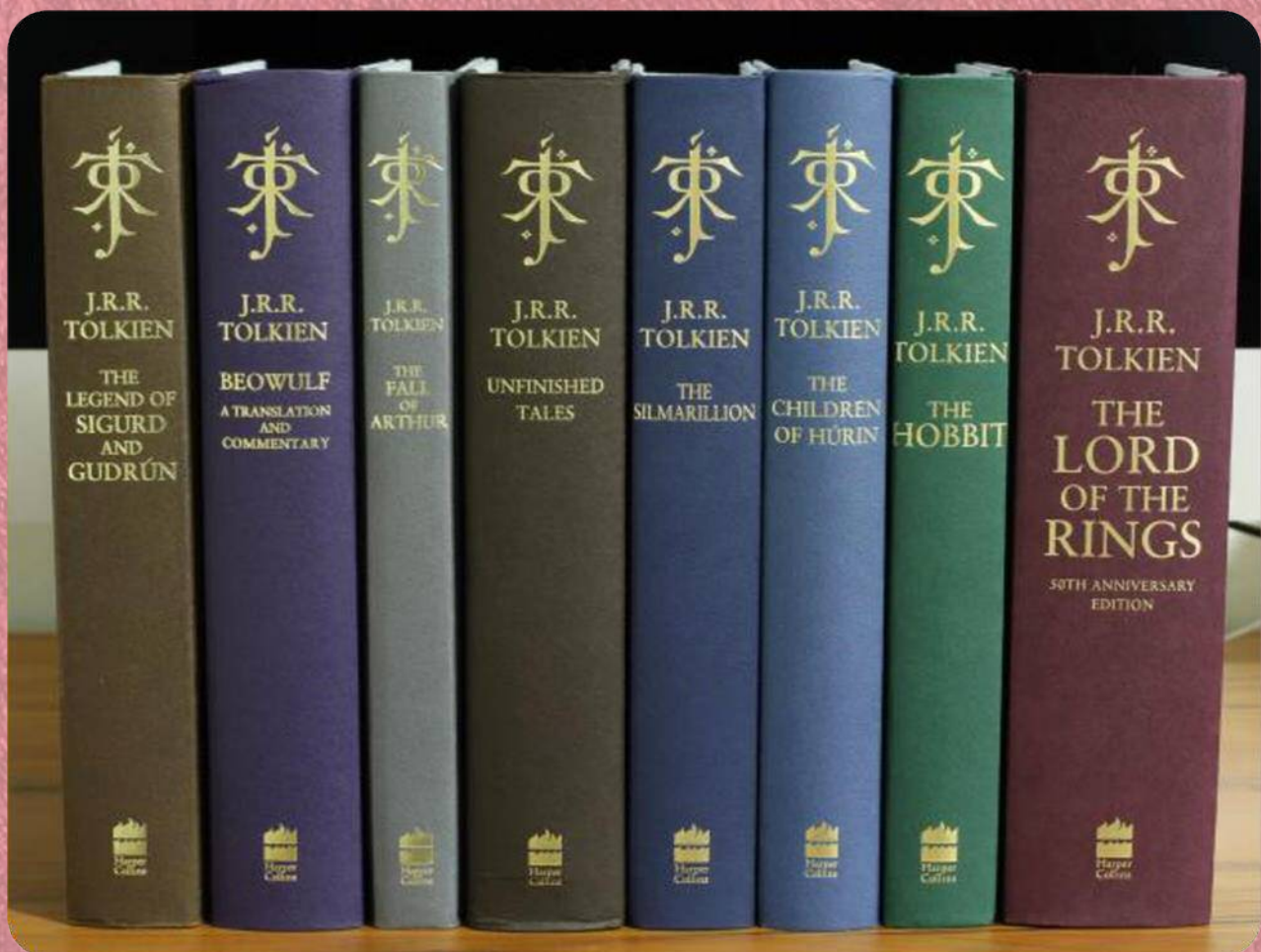
The same often holds true with books. *Dune* by Frank Herbert is rightfully considered one of the greatest sci-fi novels ever written. *Dune Messiah* and *Children of Dune* generally hold up well, but the three other sequels Herbert penned seem to run out of gas. As for the more than a dozen "Dune" books his son Brian wrote with Kevin J. Anderson, even the better ones are, at most, forgettable. While *The Wheel of Time* series by Robert Jordan is rightfully considered a classic, that series certainly did not merit fourteen novels in addition to a stand-alone prequel in *The New Spring*. Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman gave their *Dragonlance* series an excellent conclusion at the end of the "Chronicles" trilogy, only to offer yet another solid finish in *Dragons of Summer Flame*, before undermining both of them with a rash of other books set on Krynn. Writers should take a lesson from Tolstoy who ended *War and Peace* with Pierre and Natasha enjoying life with their families and friends. Thankfully, Tolstoy decided not to write about Pierre joining the Decemberists some two decades before the novel opened.

Of course, Christopher Tolkien has taken his father's notes and drafts to create many books. But none of them are sequels to *The Lord of the Rings*. Instead, *The Silmarillion* and the books carved out of it – *The Children of Hurin*, for example – just flesh out the world. The dozen volumes in *The History of Middle-earth* offer a detailed and informative look at Tolkien's creative process. None of these books tell us about Frodo's life in Valinor, King Elessar's reign, or what Gimli did to become Lord of the Glittering Caves.

Tolkien realized his story was finished and decided not to go forward with *The New Shadow*. That's a lesson many of us can learn, especially as we continue to be bombarded with endless *The Fast and the Furious*, *Hotel Transylvania* and *Pirates of the Caribbean* sequels.

While Tolkien did not care for his work, Walt Disney said it best. When asked if he could make a sequel to the "Three Little Pigs" cartoon, Disney simply replied, "You can't top pigs with pigs." Of course, he made sequels to the "Three Little Pigs" anyway, which turned out to be pretty forgettable. Still, there's a lesson there. Sometimes, you just need to wrap up a story at the right spot. Frodo, Bilbo, Elrond, Galadriel and Gandalf sail away. Pierre and Natasha raise Prince Andrei's son as their own. Things go south when stories drag on. Indiana Jones rides off into the sunset in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*...only to come back twenty years later and deal with aliens.

As Samuel Johnson noted, nobody wanted *Paradise Lost* to have another word added to it. But then again, *Paradise Regained* by Milton ranks as a stinker of a sequel right up there with *The Godfather III*, *Rocky V*, *Jaws: The Revenge*, *Police Academy 7: Mission to Moscow* and *Highlander 2: The Quickening* (the sad part is, I can go on here). Tolkien did the right thing in ending his story where he did before his gold turned to green from tarnishing.



Dragons, Bears and Birds

By Alku04

The wind blew casually in the bright afternoon sun, playing with the plant life that grew on the banks of the Bruinen River as it passed. Green blades of grass swayed in a hypnotic dance while the clouds in the sky made a slow retreat toward the east. Never had the sky looked so blue before, nor the water so clear or the grass so green.

Elrohir let out a sigh as he lay on the ground looking up to study the ever-changing shapes of the puffy white atmospheric creations. His head was pillowed on his hands that were knit together, and he crossed a leg over his bent knee, bouncing it absently.

He chanced a glance at his twin brother who lay beside him trying to see if he had occupied himself with any activity, but his twin was in much the same position he was. However, Elladan had closed his eyes to cut off the sense of sight, allowing his ears to hear the burble of the running river, his exposed skin to feel the passing wind. The solid earth surrounded him and he let his nose savor the pleasant freshness that emanated from the forest.

The elves had been in that position for the better part of the morning, wallowing in the peaceful calm that they seemed to never be able to find as of late. Nearly every day was consumed with the hunt and destruction of any orc forces they could come across, letting their hatred fuel their need to slaughter the dark and foul creatures that ultimately took their mother from them and drove their family apart.

But today, they needed a break. Neither elf needed to say so, for they could feel an unnatural weariness settle over them and for the first time in many long months, their day was not spent consumed by their dark norm. Today was a day to relax and rest, if only to prepare them for their next hunt.

Elrohir turned his attention back to the sky and let out another sigh. Each time he breathed out, he could feel a haunting weight being chipped away and he breathed deep, only to let it out in a relaxed huff for a third time.

"Sshhh," Elladan commanded as he resettled himself and folded his hands across his chest, never opening his eyes.

Elrohir looked sharply to his brother and frowned, not pleased with being told what to do. However, he did not have it in him at the moment to retaliate. His eyes sought the sky once more and he let his mind go off where it wanted. The clouds before his eyes held recognizable

Shapes and he recalled many occasions in his younger days when their mother would take them out to this very spot to cloud gaze and point out the shapes they saw.

There is a heart.... And a fox's head.... That one looks like two fish swimming up river, the elf thought to himself and continued to pick out the shapes that he could see. A rather large cloud came into view and the elf could feel a smoldering burn begin in his insides. *That one looks like a hunchbacked orc...*

"Do you think we will be able to kill them all?" Elrohír asked out loud with no thought to the words he was speaking. "Orcs, I mean?"

"I would like to," Elladan stated with a yawn. "But you know that is near impossible. The forces of Middle-earth have been dealing with them for centuries, even before we were born. I doubt the two of us are the answer to the world's problems. But I do think you and I can keep them away from home, at least. That would be my goal."

"I wish it could go back to the way it used to be," the younger twin said gloomily and watched as the orc cloud in the sky was swept off and molded by the wind into another shape.

"Wish what could?"

"Life..."

Elladan did not comment back.

The silence took over again and Elrohír began looking at the other sights to be seen before his eyes. Tree branches loomed overhead and a squirrel was scrambling through the thin, twig-like upper branches trying to search for something eatable through the clusters of nuts that were far too green to be ripe. A spider's web blew in the air currents while the tiny arachnid rode the wave of air in its threaded home, unfazed by the disturbance it caused. A wood thrush chirped noisily and the hammering of a woodpecker drilled the forest, adding a steady rhythm to nature's song around them. Each creature seemed to be at peace and was content to carry out its life as it was intended to, playing vital, yet small roles in everyday life in Middle-earth.

Elrohír let off his fourth sigh. Sometimes he wished he could be like a small, unassuming creature. Or even a creature of might. Actually, he wished he could be *anything* different. That would be a nice change – to see the world in a different light, to not care about orcs or goblins, nor feel the threat of shadows that were ever-present at your doorstep.

"Elladan?... If you could be anything other than an elf, what would you be?"

"Hum?" the older twin asked. He heard the question directed to him, but it was unexpected and he did not know how to react.

"If you could take on a new form and a new life, even for just a short while, what would you choose?"

"Where is this coming from?"

Elrohír shrugged his shoulders, but the action was lost to his brother who kept his sights restricted to the back of his eyelids. "It is just a question that came to mind... something to ponder over."



Elladan smirked and shook his head, but did not answer. He went back to trying to enjoy the peace, but Elrohír was content talking. Elrohír rolled over to lie on his side and watched his brother's unmoving form as he rambled off his thoughts.

"I think... I would be... a dragon," Elrohír said carefully and watched to see how his twin would react to such a wish.

"A dragon?!" Elladan's eyes snapped open and he turned his head at an odd angle to look at his brother. "Why on earth would you want to be a dragon?"

"Well, why not?" Elrohír defended lightly. "A great, strong serpent. Something of legends and tales. I think it would be different and worth trying out... besides, I think it would be rather aweing to be able to breathe fire... do you not agree? I wonder how they do it."

"They breathe out."

Elrohír gave his brother an unamused frown. "I know that, but they would have to do something to get the fire going, right? What do they do? And I wonder if their throat hurts after..."

Elladan's brows knit in as he gave off a huffed, half-chuckle. "I sometimes wonder about you...Where did you get this idea from? Have you been drinking with Glorfindel again?"

"Oh, come now, have you not looked at a creature and wondered what it would be like to live like them? Good or bad? I know dragons are not the most loved creatures, but in my opinion, they do not lead a very terrible life. They are not set on death and destruction like an orc. If you leave them alone, they leave you alone."

"And what is it about a dragon's life that makes it so appealing to you?" Elladan turned back to his previous position, but this time kept his eyes open and looked out into the bright sky.

"Well, for one, they get to sleep peacefully, in a mountain -"

"So you want to be a *lazy* dragon?... A sloth?" Elladan looked again to his brother, getting a glimpse of surprise on his face that was a result of his witty remark. He grinned wickedly and looked back to the sky. "You need not be a dragon for that. You manage quite well on your own as an elf."

Elrohír gave his mirror image a swat for the brotherly insult. "You nit!"

"So if you could choose from any animal, creature, or person, you would be a dragon to see what it is like to be able to breathe fire and sleep in a cave?"

"Well, not *just* that..."

"What else is there to being a dragon? Fear? Terror?"

"Gold."

"Gold?"

"Yes... you know of their love of gold. Can you image having a dragon's horde of it? Mountains and mountains of it?"

Elladan thought it over for a moment. "...It would be a lot," he admitted.

"A lot? Lost for words, are you? If I were a dragon, I'm sure I would have more gold than I would know what to do with!"

"If you were a dragon, there would be nothing you could do with it!" Elladan pointed out.

Elrohír's face seemed to drain of any emotion and he stared blankly at his twin. "What do you mean?"

"You really think a dragon has any use for gold?" Elladan's smile was bemused. "When was the last time you saw one in a market buying honey cakes from the baker? Hum? Or buying tools or other necessities?"

Elrohír thought. "Well... they do not eat honey cakes."

"Elrohír," Elladan reproached. "Gold is completely worthless to a dragon."

"Then why do they hoard it so?"

"Jealousy, maybe...I do not know, I'm not a dragon so I do not know why it consumes their

obsession. But think... if you were a dragon, even a good dragon, and you had all the gold a dragon's lair could hold, how would it serve you? If you went to a market to buy provisions, what do you think would happen?"

Elrohír thought for a moment. "Well, I would be so large, I would probably destroy the village."

"And the people would run from you in a terror. You would never get a chance to buy anything because no one would serve you. So with that point, what would gold do for you as a dragon? You could not use it for any value."

"You are making this far more complicated than it needs to be, Elladan," Elrohír said and flopped back to the earth with a huff. This was supposed to be a game and something to talk about, but all Elladan wanted to do was offer pessimistic remarks. "A bear, then."

"A bear... why a bear?"

"They too are strong animals... almost a king of the forest. And rather than need gold to buy honey cakes that a dragon cannot get... well... I could eat all the honey I wanted instead."



"You should have more reason than eating honey to want to be a bear for a lifetime."

"They have no duties to tend to. They lumber around in the woods eating all day and preparing dens for hibernation."

"Again with the sleeping..."

Elrohír puffed in annoyed anger. "Well then, what would your perfect alternate identity be? An annoying mosquito that buzzes in one's ear?"

Elladan laughed at the insult, which made Elrohír scowl. "A mosquito... that would be an interesting life, would it not?"

"It would be a terrible life!"

"I think... if I had to choose to be another creature... I would be... I think I would be a bird."

Elrohír blinked blankly before responding with, "That's it?... A bird?"

"Aye."

"Like an eagle?"

"Well...." Elladan actually considered it, but fell silent as the thought faded out.

"An owl?"

"Nay, not an owl... Too many people associate bad omens with them. I do not want to be hated for what I truly am. I think I would be songbird of sorts... a golden finch, or a scarlet tanager, even a common wren."

"Why? There is nothing... grandly magnificent about them."

"Well, it would be my choice and would not need to be grand or magnificent to have perfect life as a songbird. I think they live a happy little life as they flit around in treetops all day and sing songs on a whim."

"I think that would be so boring..." Elrohir rolled his eyes as he spoke. "No excitement!"

"At



to
what

least I would not be sleeping all day as a dragon or bear might."

"I am not that lazy! You know, sometimes I just think it would be nice to get a break from constantly needing to do something! And if I want to just sleep for a month, then... why not?"

Elladan laughed. "But there is so much in this world

see. I would not want to sleep and miss it. Think of you could do as a bird... you could fly anywhere."

"You could fly if you were a dragon." Elrohir offered.

"I do not want to be a dragon. I want to be a bird... to fly in the wind wherever I wanted to. I could fly to Lothlorien and see Arwen any time I wanted," he said.

"She would not recognize you! Arwen would probably shoo you away with your terrible songs," Elrohir teased.

After a moment, Elladan opened his mouth to speak, but his tone of voice was soft and distant, almost as if a heartache suddenly gripped it and left him with little air to speak.

"I could fly over the sea to see Nana (mother)," he said seriously.

All of a sudden, Elrohir became very still and quiet after his brother's comment. This was no

laughing matter anymore. The joyous mood had shattered and was carried off by the wind that made another pass.

Elrohír suddenly wished he too was a bird.

The brothers lost themselves in thought as the clouds continued to pass overhead, and as if being able to read the thoughts of loss, Elladan reached out and placed a comforting hand on his twin's shoulder, offering as much silent support that he could spare without abandoning his own hurt.

This was not what this talk was supposed to be about. It was unbelievable how this little conversation, meant to lighten a mood, had suddenly changed and now the brothers were reluctant to speak.

Elrohír took charge of the conversation and forced it in another direction. They spent too much time weeping over their mother, and currently spent too much time consumed in their hate for orcs. They were out here for a break, after all, and the younger brother was not about to lose the easy day to mourning.

"Well, I know a bird that would suit you best," Elrohír whispered as the remains of sorrow clung to him, but he did his best to speak around it.

"Oh?" Elladan asked. He swept a finger across his eyes to catch the moisture quickly before the tears of loss rolled down his face. He was actually eager to hear what his brother thought and what species would be a good match for him. It would offer a distraction to the pain flaring up on the inside. Knowing Elrohír, he would choose some outlandish bird, some sort of formidable predator that led a noble life amid the forest.

"A turkey," Elrohír said, and no sooner had the words left his mouth than the younger twin exploded into a fit of laughter. The look of disbelieving shock on Elladan's face and the mental picture of his older brother as the large dumpy fowl left him in a stitch fit.

"A.... turkey?!" Elladan retorted, and he sat up and glared at his twin who was rolling on the ground holding his stomach, trying to quell the mirth.

"Aye! A fat, clumsy, ugly bird!" Elrohír said between the tears of laughter.

Elladan huffed. He was not amused. "Well, I think you would be best suited as a snail. You have your bed on your back and can sleep at a moment's notice," he sneered, doing his best to retaliate with a comeback. However, the insult failed in comparison to his brother's turkey comment. Elrohír was still giggling, though he was trying to conceal it. "It was not that funny, Ro," Elladan protested, but knew his brother had him good. He could feel the heat emanating from his cheeks as he flushed after being the butt of the terrible joke.

Elrohir breathed deeply and wiped a sleeve across his face to banish the streaks of humor that were still coursing down his face.

"I swear it, you spend far too much time with Glorfindel," Elladan said and shook his head, though traces of a smile were present upon his lips.

Elrohir sat up as well and grinned widely at his twin. He shrugged his shoulders, not sure what to say to that and not willing to talk again. He could still feel the laughter churning on the inside and if he made a peep, he knew his self-control would be lost and he would not be able to help but laugh out again.

There was a pause between the brothers and the wind made another gentle pass, beckoning the twins to carry on, a trait that the wind itself was well-known for.

"What else would you choose to be?" Elladan asked. There was a particular sparkle in his eyes, even though the conversation had turned against him. Elladan could not recall the last time he had seen his brother smile like this, nor the last time he himself could find joy in anything. For the first time in a long time he felt the traces of easy joy flood his system.

"Me?" Elrohir asked. He was taken aback that his brother wanted to hear more of his odd thoughts, but he cocked his head and pondered over all the creatures he could think of at the moment. "A lion!"

"Oh, of course a mighty lion!" Elladan laughed.
"Dragons, bears, lions! Always one for excitement! Are you sure you would not want to be a mouse... or a shrew?"

"A shrew?!" Elrohir spat. "A shrew?" he asked again.
"Who would ever think to be a shrew?!"

"Well it is a creature you could choose from, is it not?" Elladan chuckled.

"Leave it to you to choose the boring animals... songbirds and shrews!" Elrohir fell back to the earth to gaze up at the sky again. Elladan followed suit. "Why could you not choose a badger?!"

"You would not want to be badger! You know they do not get much sleep."

"I am not lazy!"

The sound of laughter from both brothers filtered through the forest as they continued to fire off their idea of a better life. Though right now, each of them knew as long as they had each other at their side, they would never really want to be anything other than an elf.



“May He Live Forever!”

A Casual Muslim Reader Reflects on the Christian Fantasy Works of Lewis and Tolkien

By Adeel Ahmed

I am a Canadian of Pakistani ancestry and a practicing Muslim. Not a perfect Muslim, as I swear like a sailor, but practicing as best I can. I was born in the 1980s and spent my childhood and early teen years in the 90s. I didn't like what most kids around me liked, other than anything with some sort of fantasy action like *X-Men* comics, *Superman* or *Batman*. But even these things were considered “geeky”, and geek culture was still pretty fringe during my childhood. Speculative fiction was still an underappreciated genre.

Then my school teachers introduced me to C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and I was utterly overjoyed.

Finally!

Finally a story with action and yet imagination, a whole new world I could explore. Finally something we were studying in school was actually fun for a kid like me.

Then in later years, my fellow Muslim reader friends introduced me to *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. These works by Lewis and Tolkien were often grouped together, since both were written by prominent Christian authors taking a crack at the fantasy genre.

Yet...Narnia and Middle-earth were very different from each other.

What did I like or dislike from them?

C.S. LEWIS: THE GOOD

One of the first things we see in *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* is that it places us in a familiar world before anything else happens. We don't need to have a historical explanation of what England is. Nothing but a brief background on the reason the children who are the main characters of the story are there. Immediately we are then thrown into the plot and get to know the characters. Even when they finally enter the wardrobe and journey into Narnia, the focus is always upon the plot, the characters and the interaction of the world with the characters.

Although Lewis wrote a story for children which often has caricatures as characters more than representatives of species of tropes, the main cast of *LWW* each have distinct personalities and perspectives about this strange land they are exploring. The characters are well-developed. The plot is fast-paced and on point.

Edmund is one of the most complex characters in the story, who isn't a bad boy but is simply tempted. He's not a demonic orc or evil spirit. He's a boy that made a mistake out of childish cravings for attention and sweets, and it nearly cost him his family. (As a side note, I like Turkish Delights too! They're very tasty. Too bad Lewis didn't appreciate the culture that produced it...but that will be touched upon later in this article.)

LWW is more of a traditional story, but it's also more coherent compared to Tolkien's saga, given that Lewis had a smaller goal and younger audience in mind.

It is true that Lewis seriously lacked complexity in his fantasy universe, but to be fair, complexity wasn't the goal – good clear narration was. The action scenes at the end of *LWW* were well-described and had excellent tension. They were detailed and clear, and they were battles of an otherworldly nature that fit appropriately his retelling of the Easter story.

TOLKIEN: THE GOOD

I do not think what I am about to write will be a surprise to anyone.

Tolkien's was very, very, very good at world building and history for his world. So many writers afterwards tried to imitate him. *Dungeons and Dragons* based fantasy novels have similar bestiaries and history behind their worlds, yet even though they may have catalogues of creatures and events like Tolkien's world did...they lack the philosophical base for Tolkien's world.

Although some Christians may hold Muslims in disdain, and vice versa, I know for a fact that many of my nerdy Muslim friends became interested and started to respect Catholic belief more because of the creatures and the world Tolkien created and the connections they have to his spiritual beliefs. Through this, they learned to respect some aspects of Catholicism.

As Muslims, we saw that Christians share much of what we believe, and even where we did not, there was still some core understanding of the importance of meaning and purpose in existence and storytelling. No other fantasy universe but Tolkien's Middle-earth has the same depth level with regards to an entire world history and creature encyclopedia, where everything has a deeper purpose and meaning behind it.

Tolkien's allegory (if it could be called an allegory, as he himself resisted the title, although his faith and personal experiences clearly influenced him greatly) was far more complex than that of Lewis. Lewis had creatures in his story, but they were mostly there as fantasy eye-candy for the kiddies. They had no distinct personalities or culture, and Tolkien himself commented on how excessively on the nose Lewis's allegories tended to be, lacking subtlety and standing out as allegory for allegory's sake.

Tolkien, however, created creatures based on myth with their own cultures, quirks and beliefs. And these different factions within his world represented different forces in our own lives and history. The allegories were far more complex, and treated what they represented as parts of systems with dimension and subtlety.

The Valar, Maia, and other angelic beings are symbolic of forces within reality themselves. The actual characters, including villains like Gollum, are more complex than that, and tend to avoid cartoonish stereotypes. A good example of mixed characters in the story is the morally gray yet ultimately redeemable like Boromir. The orcs are corrupted creatures, but even they are not purely evil in origin. They are humanoids that fell to temptation or were simply born in the wrong culture.

Within the published works of Tolkien, there are no redeemable orcs. But my friends who are diehard Tolkien's fanatics say dragons are evil in Tolkien's world...but he wrote that some choose to be good. There is always free will at the heart of things, it seems, and if Tolkien had been able to complete his expanded universe, I am positive we would also be presented with orcs who chose good. Of course, some would argue with me on that point, but I believe my theory is certainly in keeping with Tolkien's worldview.

LEWIS: THE BAD

As I established above, Lewis didn't seem to care much for world-building. He was, after all, creating a novel for children with a bedtime story feel to it, and only made sequels when the first was successful, and even then, mostly just to pass the time while he was on holiday. He did not handle his fantasy series as a serious endeavor, and still seemed to view the more speculative elements of his story as childish. He treats his creatures and even his villains as cardboard cut-outs. You can make this argument with the orcs and the villains in Tolkien's world, but the high fantasy of Middle-Earth can get away with pure evil forces because they are just that: forces and not characters or even real entities. They are part of a huge world and mythology.

While the White Witch and other villains in Narnia tend to be direct allegories for either demons or a specific symbol



for Satan, and fairly cartoonish attempts at that, in *Lord of the Rings* the forces of evil are not direct allegories but rather have their own distinct purposes in their own separate universe. Their significance goes beyond real-world symbolism. If they are allegories, they are very broad allegories.

Worse, his quasi-Muslim Calormenes were...well, I'm sure you already can guess my feelings on the subject. Having them yell "May he live forever!" after almost every sentence of dialogue proved...subtle. They were also pretty underwhelming, even with their stereotypical turbans, curved swords, crescent coins, and spicy food. Narnia is filled with weird creatures and furry people running around, but somehow the faux Arab nation is filled only with humans. Lewis did seem to like Middle Eastern candy like Turkish Delights, but that's about the end of his appreciation for the culture of the region.

To be honest, his allegory for Muslims seriously puzzles me. Even if it might be argued that he was drawing from pre-Islamic pagan motifs, he was also pretty clearly making reference to Islamic society as well, particularly with regards to the territorial expansions of the Ottoman Empire (but as a child of the British Empire, Lewis should really have looked around his own glass house before throwing stones). *Screwtape Letters* was so well researched, and yet it seems he couldn't manage to read a basic book on Islamic Aqeedah before setting his pen to paper in this case.

I do wonder how Christian Lewis fans would react to some Muslim writing a fantasy story where the Christian equivalents were similar to Englishmen, with red tunics and old-fashioned muskets, smoking pipes or cigars, eating really bland food, having really bad dental hygiene, and horribly pagan with a three-pronged god.

Hey, other people can do stereotypes too, bro!

TOLKIEN: THE BAD

So...it would be unfair of me to say that Tolkien did not write good plot. No...his plot was amazing. Did it have plot-holes? Well, we all know the cartoons on the internet saying the hobbits could have just flown over Mount Doom and thrown the ring into the volcano below with no further ado. So, no, it was not perfect.

But still, Tolkien's story about the little man and his importance compared to more powerful people remains the center of the conflict, and that must be achieved through the long journey and struggle up the slopes of Mount Doom. The humble hobbits in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are the main characters instead of the more powerful and more admired Gandalf. The point of the story was always that, as Jesus said according to the Christian Gospels, "The meek shall inherit the earth."



However...Tolkien knew he was good at world-building, then took a very good thing and made the reader sick of it sometimes. Everything had to have a backstory, even the most minute of details about the world around the characters.

I wonder if, in some future book, he would have had a scene where some elves or hobbits pass by a pile of fossilized dung, and then suddenly the narration would go on for three pages upon the history of that dung pile and the dragon that passed such waste.

But I digress. Too much information either way. Unless of course Tolkien wanted to make some commentary on "herbal remedies". That would have been a fun read for his fanbase of hippies during the 60s...it would have taken them on a quite a trip...

Thing is, even without such psychedelic delights, Tolkien managed to describe the history of every little vein on the leaf of every little tree...but then action would happen, and he'd speed everything up. An entire fight scene would be summed up so simply or otherwise glossed over. I remember one line read: "And he stabbed it with Sting."

Wow. Okay.

So, giving his friend Lewis credit where credit is due (still haven't gotten over the Muslim weirdo inserts, though), he goes into great detail of how his battles in Narnia take place and unfold, describing what the formations were and why character did what, and how they felt as they fought.

Tolkien? It seemed less important to him than a lengthy historical monologue about a footprint on Galadriel's dress. I mean, we get it, Tolkien. You know every detail about your world, and you're proud of it. You deserve a medal...

WHAT THEY BOTH COULD HAVE DONE BETTER

This may make some people angry to read, or perhaps blame my Islamic faith for these opinions, but I honestly mean no offense.

However, I honestly feel that the hyper-Christian sensitivities and British conservative culture norms tended to hold Tolkien and Lewis back at times. I do not mean to say Christianity itself was to blame, or that being British was a failing, but they both seemed to suffer from a fear of shaking the status quo boat or touching too much controversy.

I feel that if they tackled more mature themes without selling out their Christian beliefs, we could have a more expanded and less polarized fantasy geek culture today.

Of course, these were men of the Edwardian era, an age of more propriety and social reserve. As a result, they shied away from covering complex topics on war and sexuality and death and racism (well, beyond the lovable relationship between Gimli and Legolas. Boy, that man has a nice wig...Gimli clearly thought so too...).

I don't mean that these men should have written crudely. But it seems high fantasy is in decline, and grim-dark fantasy like *Game of Thrones* is on the rise, with every third female character being sexually assaulted, and someone getting their heads cut off or worse is the norm, while pushing the values of nihilism and hopelessness that are not remotely Christian nor, for that matter, Islamic. Indeed, traditional religious beliefs in hope and meaning are often scrapped on the cutting room floor.

I didn't want to see fantasy become, frankly, a well-written Edge-lord's fantasy, like grim-dark fantasy is now. Imagine if Tolkien had a character tortured in a similar manner as Theon Greyjoy in *GoT*, but instead of it ending with a broken pathetic man who would die forgotten and not mourned...it could have been hopeful? Like the high god of Tolkien's world could have given him a vision of salvation as he died, symbolizing Christ's mercy from a Christian perspective, or as we Muslims would see it, as Allah's *noor* (light) and blessings.

Imagine if C.S. Lewis truly took the allegory of Calormenes as Muslims further, and their beliefs were portrayed as more complex. They could still be portrayed as misled...after all, Lewis was a Christian and not a Muslim, so that would be expected. He didn't have to agree with Muslims, but he could have at least portrayed them as real people with beliefs that were not just simply evil and wrong, but had shreds of truth shared with Aslan the Christ-Lion.

In fact...wouldn't it have been fascinating to see the Calormenes argue the real identity of Aslan? Lewis's world basically says he is Christ the lion and thus, in keeping with Christian theology, God in lion flesh. It may not be said, but it certainly is implied. Maybe the Calormenes could revere Aslan but disagree upon his divine nature, just as real Muslims do. And maybe the Calormenes are *wrong* in the universe of Narnia, because Lewis is trying to argue in favour of Christianity. But it would have at least dealt with the controversy more intelligently than his one-dimensional, motley bunch of spice-consuming Arabs.

And back to Tolkien's Orcs...do they feel pain or despair? Do they pray for anything? Do they have families? One thing the *Dungeons and Dragons* versions of these stories do is show the 'evil' creatures still have communities and personalities, especially the newer ones before Grimdark fantasy took over.



The Draconians in *DragonLance* were almost bloodthirsty monsters, but even then, as the franchise moved on before ending, Draconians seemed to have different factions and even goodhearted versions of themselves. It was commentary on racism and stereotyping living things.

Last but not least, Lewis and Tolkien both really shied away from violence, almost to an unreasonable excess, in most of their fight scenes. Really? You talk about them murdering hordes of monsters and orcs, but barely ever mention blood. Perhaps Lewis could be given more of a pass, given his main audience was children, but Tolkien was supposed to be writing the first *adult* fantasy. Again, he didn't have to go overboard, but some realism would have made it more believable and mature.

While I hate how George R.R. Martin emphasizes that nothing has soul or meaning, I must admit that he did have good fight scenes, and his characters have their own fighting styles, tactics, weapon, ways they react upon being injured, etc. Also, violence has consequences. People get maimed and traumatized by battle. But in Tolkien's world, you're either a good fighter or you're fodder. You win or you die, with little more said about what happens afterwards. There isn't any lasting PTSD or consequences.

Why didn't these stories have these elements I am complaining about?

First, they still thought fantasy only appealed to children and young adults; and secondly, their writings were mainly being used as vehicle to deliver a Christian message (a Christian message which, for the most part, I actually like).

But they seemed to not understand that their writings could have been received by a much wider audience and could have said so much more in a way that would have left a lasting impression on the world around them. By creating whole new universes, they had so much room to comment about multiple issues and expand the genre in so many new ways.

Avellina, my friend and the kindhearted editor of this magazine, is writing a series of novels retelling the legend of Robin Hood. It isn't fantasy, but rather historical fiction, and at times, it can be brutal in its depiction of medieval violence. Yet Avellina's story has historical violence without indulging in the almost exploitive vigor of George RR Martin and his ilk. He excuses this by simply saying he is portraying history...but he is only portraying the worst of history. In Avellina's story, though it can get dark at times, there is always a message of hope and beauty from a Christian perspective, just like Lewis and Tolkien tried to portray.

My own story in progress is about superheroes in an alternative history where mythological gods and creatures exist. Lots of very bad things happen to these characters, yet there is a purpose or a lesson for each. It's part of their development. I love fighting and martial arts, and that makes its way into my story. But it has consequences, and violence is both glorified as an art form yet also shown as being ugly and unappealing, and scars people for life. I cover racism and sexism and anti-religious bigotry within the story, including anti-Christian bigotry. In all this, I strive to put soul in my stories.

I am not nearly the writer Tolkien and Lewis were. But I am trying.

Imagine if brilliant writers like Lewis and Tolkien had expanded their stories and taken them more seriously, beyond children and young adults as their primary audiences. Imagine if they had turned it into something bigger. Imagine if the Christianity they had wanted to preach was not just symbols and lessons, but Christianity reflected in every aspect of life and with allegories truly similar to real life.

SPICY FOOD: ENEMY OF THE CHRISTIAN THINKER

Last but not least...pardon the Muslamic rant, but is spicy food somehow the enemy of the Christian Thinker? I mean, imagine if Lewis had truly stopped caring about spicy food long enough to chill out and do some cultural research...

I mean, Lewis, dude, how weak could you possibly be? You believe Christ got crucified! I'm sure He'd expect his followers (who originally came from the Middle East) to be able to handle some heat/spice, even if they are English!

Go eat a taco. That's Hispanic, not Middle Eastern, and its spicy. Or eat Shawarma. Shawarma isn't spicy, and it's Middle Eastern.

Ironically, Lewis liked Hinduism...yet he never obsessed over their food like he did Muslim food. Did he ever even try South Asian cuisine? Man, my people's food is very spicy. Hindus eat the same spice as we do in the region. I'm Pakistani, a culture with a mixture of Hindi, Arab, and other influences (think Mexico...

Indigenous, Spanish, etc.), but most of our dishes are from our former Hindu past.

Remember: Catholics in Sudan and the rest of Africa eat some pretty spicy food. I know Indian Christians love spicy food. Arab Christians love spicy food. And, in yet another twist of irony, England seems to have caught the craving, because Pakistani and Indian restaurants are doing swimmingly over there.

Anyway, for those who wish to know, the real-world equivalents of Calormenes (raises hand) say "*Salla allahu alaihi wa sallam*" (Peace be upon him). So in the spirit of goodwill, may peace be upon Tolkien and Lewis. I hope the latter doesn't have to eat any spicy food in heaven....

Then again, if I get to paradise, I may be inspired to bring him up some wholesome hindu daal, with extra spice, from my mom's recipe book...



J.R.R. Tolkien, Owen Barfield, Charles Williams, and C.S. Lewis:
four members of the literary group known as the Inklings

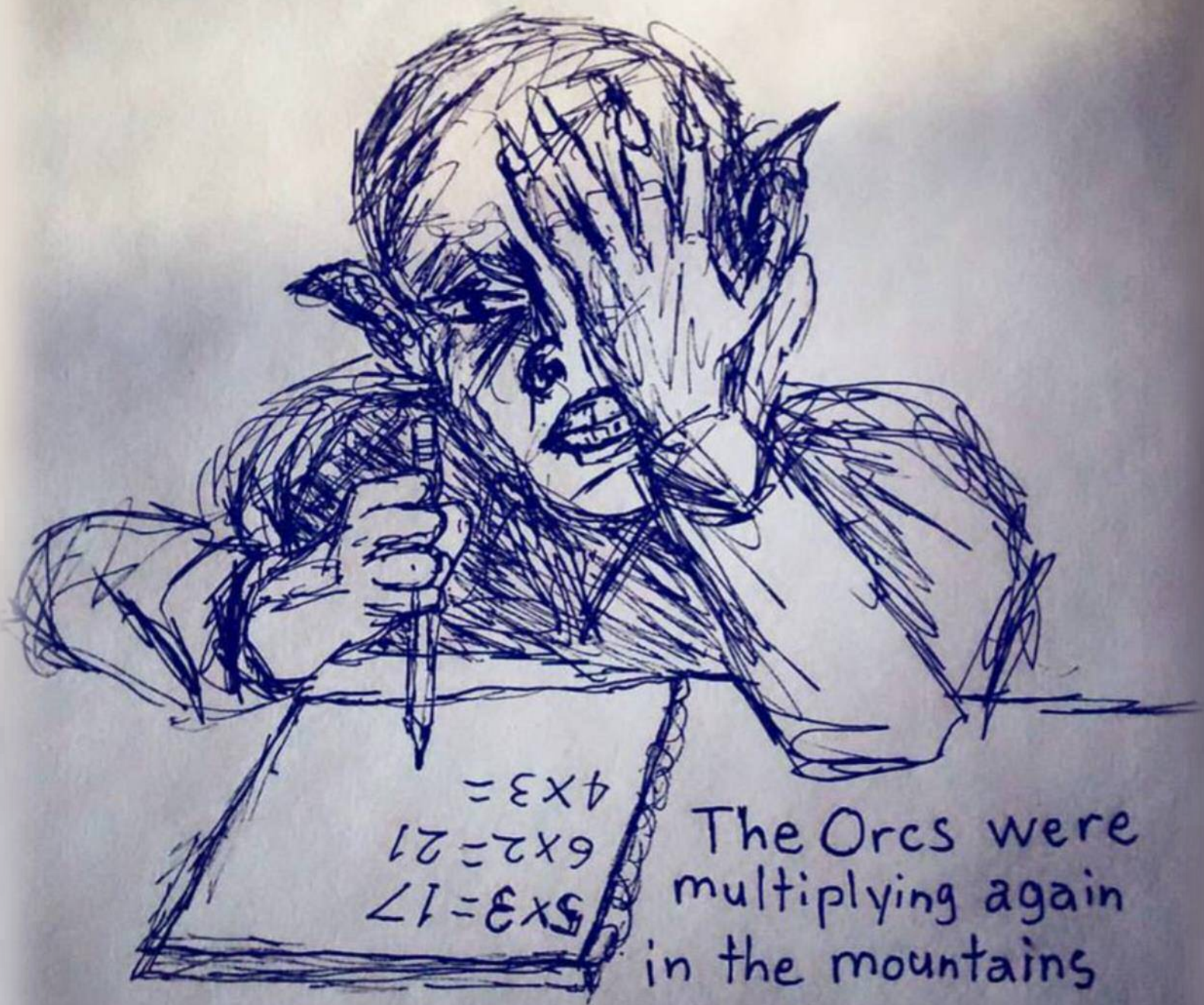


Illustration by Swan White

About This Magazine

Fellowship and Fairydust Magazine is a publication of Fellowship & Fairydust Publications. F&F is an online literary blog and magazine that aims to inspire faith and creativity and explore the arts through a spiritual lens. F&F came into being when the blog and online magazine The Fellowship of the King merged with the online magazine Ink and Fairydust in January 2017. To learn more, visit fellowshipandfairydust.com.

Copyrights

All articles and artwork belong to their respective creators and may not be copied without permission. Any copyright infringements are purely accidental. The works of JRR Tolkien are owned and copyrighted by the Tolkien Estate, their publishers and studios; other works/characters borrowed are owned and copyrighted by their authors and/or respective publishers and studios; all are used here for entertainment purposes.

There's More Where This Came From!

Did you like what you saw here? There's more where that came from! Plus, these are only a fraction of the many fandoms we cover! To learn more, visit fellowshipandfairydust.com and follow us on Facebook at Fellowship & Fairydust Publications and on Twitter @FandFMagazine.

Graphics Team

Avellina Balestri, Bard Judith, Sarah Levesque, Amanda Pizzolatto

Image Citation

Pictures from the *Lord of the Rings* and/or *Hobbit* movies are copyrighted by New Line Cinemas. Images not otherwise cited are either from the movies or from the personal collections of the graphic designers.

Table of Contents - amazon.com/Middle-Earth-Fabric-Poster-20x13inch/dp/B00IE89JKM (background);
Editor's Note - telegraph.co.uk/books/authors/tolkien-interview-its-easier-to-film-the-odyssey/ (Tolkien);
Springtime with Tolkien - "Creation 12 Spring" (background), "Spirits 1 - Sacred Feminine" (Mary Icon), "Pathways 1 - Spirit" all courtesy Judith Alkema, Belle Coeur Wisdom Pacquet Cards; **Never Too Young** - Illustrations by Bard Judith; **Sins of the Eldar** - pixabay.com/photos/forest-sunbeams-trees-sunlight-56930/ (background); mercatornet.com/images/new/silmarillion-2.jpg (silmaril); goldseven.wordpress.com/2012/03/19/now-it-ends-in-flame/ (figure in flames); pixabay.com (diamonds, wilted rose, star); **Manwaelmelwe** - pixabay.com (girl); **Tolkien Maker of Middle Earth** - admin.ox.ac.uk/access/libraries/westonlibrary/westonlibraryexhibitions/paces/westonlibraryexhibitions/paces (nose up); Tolkien from DeviantArt by Balkoth26; Wikimedia Commons (Thror's Map and Old English document);
Thorongil - lotr.fandom.com/wiki/Gondor (shield, background); lotr.fandom.com/wiki/Lothlorien (Lothlorien); **Reflections on LotR** - Cartoon image via Rankin/Bass & Warner Bros; **The Prayers at the Foot of the Altar** - catholicgentleman.net (Tolkien); images.penguinrandomhouse.com/cover/9780385029308 (book); Saint Therese And The Snow by natamon {Natalie Ewert} on deviantART; Backgrounds: Vintage wallpapers (of Tolkien's name designed by Targie Baxter, At Journal Emporium courtesy of Bard Judith); **Wrath, to Ruin** - hotelroomsearch.net/united-kingdom/cobblestones (cobblestones); **The Man Who Painted Leaves** - amazon.com/Leaf-Niggle-J-R-Tolkien/dp/0008205531 (book cover); photowall.com/canvas/yellow-wood-green-leaves (background); **The Lady of Rohan** - yourpictureframes.com/products/Chain-Mail-Metal-Picture-Frame.html (chainmail frame); outr4events.com/eur/product/6618medieval-cloak-favian-for-children/ (little girl); armes-blanches-fantasy.skyrock.com/2289448129-Epee-d-Eowyn.html (sword); **Two Sides of Womanly Beauty** - flickr.com/photos/gabrielrubino/34723852394 (Galadriel); flickr.com/photos/tacitrequiem/34936594510 (Eowyn, page); Nór Badger on DeviantArt (Eowyn sketch); commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sun_and_Moon_Nuremberg_chronicle.jpg (woodcut backgrounds);
Another Magical Ring - pixabay.com (Gravel texture, fireball, lava texture, gold ring, the One Ring); our creations or gif made dwarf-hair/ (female dwarf); commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vacation_in_Mrdr.jpg (mountains); **How Harry Healed My Inner Frodo** - All images from the Harry Potter movies (copyright - Warner Brothers) and the LotR movies; **Tolkien Was Wise to Put the Kibosh on the Fourth Age** - onlinefabricstore.net/red-panne-velvet-fabric-.htm?gclid=EAlaIqobChMlu3uqZ4QVv4TtCh34GgQpEAQYAYABEgJEbvD_BwE (background), librarything.com/topic/157761 (books); **Dragons, Bears and Birds** - cloud appreciation of ety or girl this-white-cloud/ (background); wikipedia.org/wiki/File:2010-kodiak-bear-1.jpg (bear); allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_Goldfinch/id (finch); scientificamerican.com/article/smart-minded-strategy-the-common-shrew-shrinks-its-head-to-survive-winter/ (shrew); **May He Live Forever** - hyperbole.es/2016/08/encuentros-en-oxford/ (Lewis); tolkiensociety.org/author/biography/ (Tolkien); villains.wikia.com/wiki/Rabadash (Calorman); 200.hc.com/stories/the-inklings/ (Inklings); **About/Graphics** - laoistoday.ie/2019/01/26/fr-paddy-its-nearly-spring-a-reef-of-hope/

JOIN US FOR OUR
SUMMER ISSUE:

FRENCH GOTHIC

1700s & 1800s

- Beauty and the Beast - The Count of Monte Christo -
- Cyrano de Bergerac - The Hunchback of Notre Dame - Les Miserables -
- The Phantom of the Opera - The Scarlet Pimpernel -
- A Tale of Two Cities - The Three Musketeers - Etc. -

We're looking for

- facts -
- fanfiction -
- original fiction -
- poetry -
- movie & book reviews -
- artwork -
- and more -

