

The Return of the King



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF J. R. R. TOLKIEN

J.R.R. Tolkien was born in Bloemfontein, South Africa in 1892 and left for England, his parents' home country, at the age of three with his mother and brother. His father intended to join the family, but passed away before he could make the journey. Tolkien was subsequently brought up Catholic by his mother, who also educated him until her death when Tolkien was 12 years old. Tolkien completed a degree in English language and literature at Exeter College, Oxford. During World War I, he was posted to France as a British soldier, and his experiences in the war—including seeing many of his school friends dying—provided much of the inspiration for the themes of war and mortality in his trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien became a professor at Oxford in 1925 and retired in 1959, having found fame during his tenure with the publication of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. He died in 1973 at age 81.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though Tolkien was uncomfortable with the idea that *The Lord of the Rings* stood as an exact allegory for any other event or theme, many of the trilogy's characters and events were inspired by—or at least can be clearly linked to—his time as a soldier in World War I. Samwise Gamgee, in particular, was inspired by the loyal working-class men Tolkien fought alongside. Tolkien's scholarship in Old English built the foundations of the people of Rohan, whose language and heritage were drawn in large part from the Anglo-Saxons. The hobbits' home of the Shire, meanwhile, was inspired by Tolkien's childhood in the English countryside.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Lord of the Rings was the natural follow-up to Tolkien's first novel, [The Hobbit](#), which focuses on Bilbo's adventure to the Misty Mountains with Gandalf and 13 dwarves, during which he finds the One Ring. While writing the trilogy, Tolkien was also creating an extensive mythology for the peoples of Middle-earth, which was published posthumously as [The Silmarillion](#). These works led to Tolkien's status as one of the main proponents of modern fantasy, alongside C. S. Lewis and his *Chronicles of Narnia*, and was a great source of inspiration for works ranging from George R. R. Martin's series *A Song of Ice and Fire* to Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea Quartet*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Return of the King

- **When Written:** 1937–1949
- **Where Written:** Oxford, England
- **When Published:** 1955
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** High Fantasy, Epic
- **Setting:** Middle-earth
- **Climax:** Frodo reaches the heart of Mount Doom and destroys the Ring, defeating Sauron and his armies.
- **Antagonist:** Sauron
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Three-in-one. Tolkien's vision for *The Lord of the Rings* was as a stand-alone novel. The idea to split the story into three books was necessitated by the post-World War II paper shortage, which meant that sending a 1000-page tome to print was not a viable option.

The Atlantis Complex. Tolkien had a recurring dream of a great wave submerging green fields, which he dubbed his "Atlantis complex." This dream provided the foundation for one of the tales of Middle-earth's Second Age, which Tolkien chronicled in *The Silmarillion*. He eventually came to learn that one of his sons, Michael, seemed to have "inherited" the same dream from him.



PLOT SUMMARY

The Return of the King, the final novel in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, picks up immediately where the previous installment, [The Two Towers](#), left off. Frodo and Sam, two hobbits from the peaceful land of the Shire, are reaching the end of their quest to destroy the **Ring**—the weapon of the antagonist, Sauron—in the flames of Mount Doom. Minas Tirith, now the strongest city of Men, prepares for war against Sauron, whose is returning to his full strength. Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli—three of the nine members of the Fellowship who set out to destroy the Ring—have just assisted the people of Rohan in their battle against Saruman's army at Helm's Deep and are planning their next moves. And Gandalf, a wizard and the orchestrator of the Fellowship, has miraculously returned from his fatal fall into the depths of Khazad-dûm and is proving increasingly necessary in the struggle of Middle-earth's free people—namely, hobbits, Elves, Dwarves, and Men—against Sauron's armies of orcs and Southron men. After Pippin, one of the other two hobbits of the Fellowship,

used the **Seeing Stone** he found at Isengard and accidentally revealed himself and a few details of the Fellowship's journey to Sauron, Gandalf decided to take him to Minas Tirith. This is to ensure Sauron doesn't think the Ring, which he knows is in the hands of a hobbit, is travelling with the Rohirrim. Gandalf wants Sauron's full attention on Minas Tirith, not searching for the Ring—if Sauron is able to locate and reclaim the Ring, there's no way the free armies will be able to defeat him.

After days of furious riding, Gandalf and Pippin arrive at Minas Tirith, the walled city of Gondor. During their journey, they saw beacons lit on the hills: war is approaching, and Gondor needs help. Gandalf takes Pippin to meet with Denethor, the Steward of Gondor. Despite Gandalf's warning not to say much to Denethor, Pippin ends up offering him his service and is sworn in as a Guard of the Citadel. To his great frustration, Gandalf quickly realizes that Denethor is unwilling to take advice on the subject of Gondor's battle strategy. While Gandalf attends council meetings, Pippin roams the city. He sees a huge **shadow** growing from Mordor and begins to understand that war is on Gondor's doorstep.

Meanwhile, Merry, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli ride to Helm's Deep with Théoden and his guard. As they ride, they are approached by a group of Dúnedain Rangers—friends of Aragorn. The Rangers brought advice from Elrond to consider taking the Paths of the Dead, and when Aragorn decides, after using the Seeing Stone to communicate with Sauron, that he will approach Minas Tirith via that route, Théoden resigns himself never to see Aragorn again.

When the Rangers arrive at Dunharrow, Éowyn greets them. She attempts to convince Aragorn to allow her to ride with them and is distressed when he refuses. Aragorn and his men make their way along the Paths beneath the Haunted Mountain, where the silence and darkness spook the men and their horses. They emerge from the mountain caves and sense the army of the Dead following them—Aragorn has fulfilled the prophecy as heir to the throne of Gondor and called on them to fulfill their longstanding oath.

Merry becomes Théoden's esquire and rides to Dunharrow with him, where the Rohirrim have gathered. But Théoden releases Merry from his service in anticipation of battle, and Merry is adamant that he won't be left behind while everyone he loves has gone to war. A Rider called Dernhelm takes him on his horse secretly, hidden beneath his cloak. Rohan's riders muster to assist Gondor in battle, despite the enemy encroaching on their own lands.

The shadow has covered the lands of Gondor and Rohan. Faramir's company returns to Minas Tirith from Ithilien, and on their approach to the city, they're assailed by Black Riders. Faramir's return brings the people of the city joy, but his father, Denethor, greets him coldly and suggests that Gondor's fate would be more hopeful if Faramir had died in his brother Boromir's place. Faramir brings the news that Frodo and Sam

are taking the Stairs of Cirith Ungol to reach Mordor. Though Gandalf worries about their safety on this path, he is reassured to know that Frodo and Sam have been seen alive so recently.

Denethor commands Faramir to lead the defense of Osgiliath. It's a hopeless battle, but Denethor refuses to let the city go without a fight. Mordor's armies, led by the Lord of the Nazgûl, quickly swarm Osgiliath and destroy Minas Tirith's outer wall. Faramir is gravely wounded, and his men have been scattered and decimated. When Denethor sees Faramir's deathlike body, he resigns himself to despair. He sits beside his son and refuses to command his besieged city's troops.

While Minas Tirith burns and its soldiers succumb to despair, Denethor takes Faramir to the House of the Steward where he plans to burn himself and his son alive. He orders Pippin to fetch wood and oil. Pippin goes to find Gandalf instead, who is being challenged by the Lord of the Nazgûl. A horn rings out: the Rohirrim have arrived, and the Lord of the Nazgûl flies off to join the battle, leaving Gandalf to save Faramir. Gandalf tries to convince Denethor to hold onto hope that Gondor will survive. But Denethor, having looked into the Seeing Stone, believes that hope is foolish. When Gandalf takes Faramir away, Denethor lights the funeral pyre, throws himself onto it, and burns to death.

Upon the arrival of the Lord of the Nazgûl on the battlefield, Théoden is crushed by his spooked horse. Dernhelm comes to Théoden's defense. When Dernhelm removes his helmet, Merry realizes that it's actually Éowyn he's been riding with. He assists her in her defeat of the Nazgûl who, though he claims he cannot be defeated by a man, is left vulnerable to the attacks of Merry, a hobbit, and Éowyn, a woman. When the Lord of the Nazgûl is defeated, the oppressive shadow disperses.

Though the Rohirrim had early success defeating Mordor's front lines, they are outnumbered by the enemy armies who continue to approach Minas Tirith. Their victory is only won when Aragorn and his company arrive on the Black Ships, unfurling the royal banner of Gondor.

The wounded, including Faramir, Éowyn, and Merry, are taken to the city's Houses of Healing. The Healers have little success saving the sick from the affliction of the Dark Shadow, which is caused by proximity to the Nazgûl. It's only Aragorn's skill that revives the patients. Though he's the heir to the throne, Aragorn refuses to claim kingship yet, camping outside the city while Imrahil takes on temporary stewardship. Aragorn and the other captains meet to strategize what they predict will be their last act of war—they'll march on the Black Gate of Mordor in the hope of drawing Sauron's attention away from Frodo, whose quest to destroy the Ring must be successful if there's to be any peace in Middle-earth again.

While battle rages at Minas Tirith, Sam rescues Frodo from the orcs at the Tower of Cirith Ungol and accompanies him through the treacherous fields of Mordor to reach Mount Doom. They

don't have enough food or water for the return journey, and the burden of the Ring is becoming unbearable for Frodo. They finally reach the chasm of Mount Doom, but Frodo refuses to give up the Ring. Gollum, having followed the pair through Mordor, attacks Frodo and bites the Ring off his finger, dancing in joy before falling into the mountain's fiery core and destroying the Ring as he dies.

At the moment of the Ring's destruction, Aragorn's armies are fighting a hopeless battle at the Black Gate. They're vastly outnumbered and on the verge of defeat when the enemy suddenly cowers and retreats: Sauron has been defeated. As Mordor crumbles, the great Eagles arrive as a favor to Gandalf, who takes them to rescue Frodo and Sam from the molten ruin of Mount Doom.

Sam and Frodo are honored on their return to Gondor, and they talk and rest with Merry, Pippin, Legolas, and Gimli. Eventually, Aragorn returns to Minas Tirith to claim his kingship at last. He begins his reign with several merciful acts and replaces the withered **White Tree** in the Citadel courtyard with a sapling that has descended from it, marking the beginning of a new, flourishing age of Men.

Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin travel home to the Shire, escorted by Gandalf. Frodo insists that they stop in Rivendell on their journey to see Bilbo, whose old age has caught up with him now that the Ring has been destroyed. When the hobbits finally return to the Shire, they find it has been overtaken by ruffians led by Frodo's relative, Lotho. They corral an army of hobbits to rebel against the ruffians, and in their victory, they realize that Lotho has been used as Saruman's puppet. Frodo banishes Saruman from the Shire, refusing to use violence against him—but Saruman's servant, Wormtongue, slits Saruman's throat before being shot down himself.

A few months after returning home, Frodo realizes that he will never fully heal from his wounds or the burden of the Ring. The next year, when Elrond, Galadriel, and Gandalf—the bearers of the Three Rings—make their way to the Grey Havens with Bilbo, Frodo joins them. After bidding farewell to the other hobbits, they sail from Middle-earth to the Undying Lands together.

evil of Sauron, so Frodo must constantly wrestle to retain control over his thoughts and decisions while he carries it. Frodo's inner strength and determination enable him to survive the treacherous journey across Mordor and into the heart of Mount Doom. When he stands at the precipice of the chasm, however, Frodo ultimately surrenders to the power of the Ring and claims it as his own. At that moment, Gollum attacks Frodo, steals the Ring, and falls into the molten heart of the mountain—a turn of events that was partly set in motion by Frodo's merciful behavior towards Gollum in the previous instalment of the trilogy. By the end of his quest, Frodo has earned the love and honor of whole nations of Men, but continues to prioritize his closest friends and relatives, like Bilbo and Sam, and cultivates a private life for himself on his return to Hobbiton. His wisdom is a valuable asset to the other hobbits in their defeat of the Chief and reclamation of the Shire, but, to Sam's disappointment, Frodo isn't celebrated as widely in the Shire as he, Merry, and Pippin are. A year after Frodo's return to his home of Bag End, he realizes that he will not recover from his harrowing journey during his mortal life, so when Elrond, Galadriel, Gandalf, and Bilbo board a ship to the Undying Lands, he goes with them.

Samwise Gamgee (Sam) – Samwise Gamgee is Frodo's companion on his journey to Mount Doom. Formerly Frodo's gardener, Sam, like most hobbits, has a love for simple, concrete pleasures, particularly cooking and eating. Sam is responsible for rescuing Frodo from the orcs at Cirith Ungol, and his practical and optimistic attitude allows him, in this moment and throughout the journey that follows, to keep searching for solutions even in the face of hopelessness. Sam is the practical, buoyant foil to the introspective Frodo, and finds himself offering all of his strength and hope to ensure that Frodo survives long enough to complete the quest. Though he finds himself tempted by the **Ring** and its promise of strength and grandeur, he is able to resist it and freely offer it back to Frodo. Sam is deeply motivated by the idea of home and all its joys, including Rosie Cotton, the girl he thinks of often when he dreams of his return to the Shire. His devotion to Frodo is so heartfelt that after marrying Rosie, the couple moves into Bag End with Frodo instead of finding their own home. Sam is heartbroken when Frodo leaves for the Undying Lands, but his final act in the novel—which is also the novel's final scene—is to return home to his family, a cooked dinner, and a fire in the hearth, epitomizing the static and comfortable ideal of a hobbit's life.

Aragorn/Strider – Aragorn is a Dúnedain ranger from the North and the heir to the throne of Gondor. He is also the respected friend and leader of many, including Legolas and Gimli, who trust him so completely that they follow him through the dreaded Paths of the Dead. Aragorn plays an integral part in the war against Sauron, to whom he symbolizes the strength of Men. He uses his ability to intimidate Sauron to



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Frodo Baggins – Frodo Baggins is the hobbit who was chosen by Gandalf to carry the **Ring** to Mount Doom. Over the course of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Frodo proved himself to be the only person who could carry the Ring without being overcome with a lust for power, due to his humility. However, his capability is repeatedly second-guessed due to his small stature and his lack of status and experience compared to Men like Aragorn or wizards like Gandalf. The Ring is imbued with the

his advantage, leading a vastly outnumbered army to a final battle at the Black Gate of Mordor with the hope that it will distract Sauron from Frodo's quest. In the midst of the war, Aragorn refuses to enter Minas Tirith to claim the throne, prioritizing a united, focused army of Men over the distraction of fanfare and personal glory. When he does finally take the throne, Aragorn's first acts are to show mercy even to peoples who fought for Sauron in the war and to acknowledge the service of all who fought with him, at one point inviting Frodo and Sam to sit on his throne. His gentleness and care mean that he's dearly loved, not only by his own race of Men but by the hobbits of the Fellowship, who continue to address him as "Strider" even within the walls of Minas Tirith. After claiming kingship, Aragorn shares his concerns with Gandalf that his line will end, at which point Gandalf shows him a sapling that has descended from the **White Tree**. Aragorn's planting of this new White Tree in the place of the old dead one, and his subsequent marriage to Arwen, make clear that he's ushering in a new age of Middle-earth in which the race of Men will flourish.

Gandalf – Gandalf, also called Mithrandir, is the wizard who entrusted Frodo with the task of bearing the **Ring** to Mount Doom. Many characters rely on him for advice or help. There are also some, such as Denethor, who feel that Gandalf's wisdom is more of an insult than an aid, and it's rumored among Men that when Gandalf arrives, bad news is sure to follow. Gandalf comes to Minas Tirith with Pippin in tow, hoping to counsel Denethor as to the best ways to prepare Gondor for war; however, he finds Denethor to be stubborn and arrogant, and he ends up making battle plans independently. When Denethor becomes overwhelmed by grief and orders his guards to burn him and his son alive, Gandalf intervenes, though he knows that removing his power from the midst of battle means that many others will die while he saves Faramir. His fearsome reputation and the respect he's cultivated within Middle-earth become obvious when, at the moment of utter hopelessness in battle, the Eagles come to the aid of Gondor's army to repay a favor. Gandalf is motivated by the responsibility he feels to save those less powerful than himself and to preserve life wherever possible, and he's also driven by the goal of defeating Sauron. When this is accomplished and the Ring has been destroyed, his own power (which is tied to one of the slightly less powerful Three Rings) begins to wane too, and he accepts that his time in Middle-earth has come to its end. Ultimately, he boards the ship for the Undying Lands along with Elrond, Galadriel, Frodo, and Bilbo.

Sauron – Sauron is the novel's antagonist and the Lord of the Rings as referred to by the title of Tolkien's trilogy as a whole. His power depends on the **Ring** he forged long ago—now carried by Frodo—which means that when the Ring is destroyed, Sauron is destroyed with it. Sauron's villainy is defined by greed and lust for power, as epitomized by the powers of the Ring, and manifests in his desire to destroy and

control all lands and people of Middle-earth. Sauron does not himself appear in any scene, even when Aragorn brings the final battle to the Black Gate (the entrance to Sauron's realm of Mordor). Instead, his presence is felt by the heavy **shadow** he casts over Middle-earth, and his plans are carried out by his servants, including the Black Riders and the Mouth of Sauron.

Peregrin Took (Pippin) – Pippin is one of the four hobbits included in the Fellowship of the Ring, and Merry's best friend. His foolhardy decision to look into the **Seeing Stone** led to Gandalf bringing him to Minas Tirith, where, on a whim, he offers his service to Denethor and is made a Guard of the Citadel. While in Minas Tirith, Pippin's thoughts are constantly with his friends, Frodo, Sam, and Merry, and it's his care for others that leads to him enlisting Gandalf's help in order to save Faramir from Denethor's reckless behavior. Pippin finally joins the battlefield at the Black Gate, where he is crushed by a troll. After returning to the Shire with Frodo, Sam, and Merry, he plays a vital part in the fight against the Chief and his ruffians, brazenly challenging all who stand in the hobbits' way. His tendency to wear his armor when riding around the Shire with Merry after their return is a clear sign of his pride in his enduring status as a Knight of Gondor.

Meriadoc Brandybuck (Merry) – Merry is one of the four hobbits included in the Fellowship of the Ring, and Pippin's best friend. He offers his sword to King Théoden and is made his squire but is told to stay behind when the Rohirrim ride to Gondor because Théoden predicts he'll be more of a burden than a help in battle. Merry rides into battle anyway when Éowyn, disguised as Dernhelm, takes him secretly on her horse. He assists Éowyn in her defeat of the Lord of the Nazgûl by striking him behind the knee, after which Merry becomes sick with the Dark Shadow and can only be revived by Aragorn's healing skill. The value of Merry's bravery and loyalty is acknowledged when Éomer knights him. He proves his newfound knowledge of battle strategy in the Battle of Bywater, which leads to the hobbits' successful reclamation of the Shire from the Chief and his ruffians.

Gollum – Gollum, originally a hobbitlike man called Sméagol, is of Frodo and Sam's former companion who betrayed them on the Stairs of Cirith Ungol. Desperate to reclaim the **Ring**, which he held for many years before Bilbo took it, he follows Frodo and Sam to Mount Doom in secrecy. On the slope of the mountain, he attacks Frodo and attempts to take the Ring. Sam threatens Gollum with his sword but shows him mercy and demands that he leave the hobbits alone. Instead, Gollum continues to follow Frodo and Sam to the very edge of the mountain's chasm, biting off Frodo's finger to finally reclaim the Ring before falling into the fire of Mount Doom and destroying it and himself. Many characters, including Frodo and Sam, pity Gollum. They understand that his desperate desire for the Ring is the main source of his cruelty and treachery. Still, despite being shown mercy many times, Gollum is eventually destroyed

by his own lust and greed.

Faramir – Faramir is Denethor’s son and Captain of the Rangers of Ithilien. After his brother Boromir’s death, he is also Denethor’s heir. Though Pippin sees Faramir as wiser and kinder than Boromir, Denethor acts cruelly towards his only living son, saying he wishes Faramir had died in Boromir’s place, and sends him into a hopeless battle in Osgiliath. Faramir returns from the battle alive, but he’s been pierced by a poisoned dart, and instead of attempting to find help and medicine, Denethor resolves to burn him alive. Faramir’s dart wound proves less dire than the affliction of the Dark Shadow, which Aragorn suspects has been worsened by Denethor’s derision and cruelty. After recovering, Faramir falls in love with Éowyn and marries her. His humility is proven by his willingness to claim his stewardship for only a short time in order to make the city ready for Aragorn’s return, and Aragorn rewards his devotion to Gondor by appointing him the Prince of Ithilien.

Denethor – Denethor is the Steward of Gondor, and Faramir and the late Boromir’s father. Gandalf’s arrival at Minas Tirith is a source of frustration and insecurity for Denethor, whose priority to protect and preserve Gondor is eventually thwarted by his own despair. Instead of following Gandalf’s advice to persevere in battle, Denethor resolves to burn himself alive alongside Faramir, who has been poisoned by an enemy dart. Denethor is a proud and jealous leader, and frequently reminds Gandalf that he has the gift of foresight. Eventually, though, that gift, alongside his use of the **Seeing Stone** through which he learns of Mordor’s huge, seemingly overpowering strength, propels his descent into despair and leads to his choice to die on the funeral pyre.

Théoden – Théoden is the king of Rohan and the uncle of Éomer and Éowyn. Though his own kingdom is under threat from Mordor, he honors the longstanding loyalty between the peoples of Rohan and Gondor and agrees to muster the Rohirrim to fight at Minas Tirith, where their skill on horseback is vital to Gondor’s victory. He is beloved as a leader, and thought of by Éomer and Éowyn, as well as Merry, as a father. Théoden’s death on the battlefield is, for him, an absolution of the years of his rule spent under the corruption of Saruman. His body is laid in the royal tombs of Minas Tirith until Éomer takes it to be buried in Rohan.

Éowyn/Dernhelm – Éowyn is Théoden’s niece and Éomer’s sister, and a shieldmaiden of Rohan. Frustrated by constantly being instructed to stay behind and protect Rohan’s women and children, she disguises herself as a Rider of Rohan called Dernhelm and rides to war at Gondor, taking Merry with her secretly. Her stubborn bravery is integral to Gondor’s victory over Mordor when she defeats the Lord of the Nazgûl, whose inability to be maimed by Men does not protect him from her. Éowyn’s recovery from the Dark Shadow is slowed by the despair she feels at being trapped by the restrictions of womanhood. During her time in the Houses of Healing, she

begins to talk to Faramir, whose love and understanding seems to encourage her to find satisfaction in a future other than death in battle. She ultimately decides to marry Faramir and to become a Healer herself, having realized that this gentler vocation could offer her the opportunity to be useful beyond her role on the battlefield.

Éomer – Éomer is Théoden’s nephew and Éowyn’s brother. He leads the Rohirrim in battle at Minas Tirith, second only to Théoden. As Théoden’s heir, he becomes the next king of Rohan after Théoden’s death. When he finds Éowyn seemingly dead on the battlefield, he experiences profound grief, though Aragorn’s description of Éowyn’s lifelong despair comes as a revelation to him. Nevertheless, his deep connection to and love for his sister allow him to call her back from under the Dark Shadow.

Legolas – Legolas is Aragorn and Merry’s close friend and one of the nine members of the Fellowship of the Ring. His loyalty leads him to follow Aragorn along the Paths of the Dead and into battle, even in the hopeless march on the Black Gate. Legolas is an elf of Mirkwood and has been warned by Galadriel to be wary of the gulls; when he sees them for the first time, he is unable to shake his longing for the sea, which is a reminder that his true home is not in Middle-earth.

Gimli – Gimli is Legolas and Aragorn’s close friend and one of the nine members of the Fellowship of the Ring. Being a Dwarf and therefore inherently at home underground, Gimli is ashamed to be crippled by fear upon entering the Paths of the Dead under the Haunted Mountain. Nevertheless, his loyalty to Aragorn leads him on even when he feels he only has the strength to crawl. He continues to follow Aragorn into battle, essentially sacrificing himself in the march on the Black Gate for the sake of Frodo’s quest. On his return home, he fulfils his fervent desire to show Legolas the Glittering Caves of Helm’s Deep.

Lord of the Nazgûl – The Lord of the Nazgûl is the chief Black Rider and Sauron’s right-hand man. He leads the attack on Minas Tirith, where his challenge to Gandalf is interrupted by the arrival of the Rohirrim. Believing himself immortal due to his inability to be maimed by Men, the Lord of the Nazgûl is defeated and killed by Merry and Éowyn, a hobbit and a woman respectively. His arrogance, similar to Sauron’s, leads to his demise, and with his death the **shadow** fades from the sky, suggesting that his survival was vital to the protection of Mordor’s darkness-loving troops.

Prince Imrahil – Prince Imrahil is the Prince of Dol Amroth, an ally to Minas Tirith. Imrahil comes to Faramir’s aid in the retreat from Osgiliath, and later leads his troops into battle after the arrival of the Rohirrim. He takes command of Minas Tirith in the final days of war, and when Aragorn musters an army for the march on the Black Gate, Imrahil ensures that enough troops are left behind to defend Minas Tirith. This proves his

loyalty to Gondor and highlights his skill for strategic thinking, even in the most hopeless situation.

Beregond – Beregond is a Guard of the Citadel in Minas Tirith, Bergil's father, and Pippin's friend. Beregond initially meets Pippin to provide him with the pass-words of the city, and the two become close friends over the next days after Beregond invites Pippin to dine with him. He plays a vital part in rescuing Faramir from Denethor's reckless behavior, slaying the gatekeeper of the House of the Stewards where Denethor plans to burn himself alive with his son, and keeping other Guards from delivering the necessary wood and oil. His failure to follow orders would ordinarily lead to a death sentence, but due to Aragorn's understanding and mercy, he is made Captain of the White Company and serves Faramir in Ithilien after the War of the Ring.

Saruman/Sharkey – Saruman was the most powerful of the wizards and was Sauron's servant until his defeat by the Ents in Isengard. Having escaped from Orthanc, the tower of Isengard, he makes his way to the Shire. There, his greed and his desire for revenge against the hobbits lead him to briefly transform the once-idyllic landscape into a dirty and oppressively productive dictatorial society in which he uses Lotho as his puppet. Saruman, referred to as "Sharkey" by the ruffians who have overtaken the Shire, is ultimately overthrown by Frodo. Frodo refuses to kill Saruman, but when Saruman makes his departure from the Shire, his constant degradation of his servant, Wormtongue, leads Wormtongue to slit his throat.

Galadriel – Galadriel is the Lady of Lothlórien and the wife of Celeborn. Her wisdom and beauty are virtually unrivalled, and her gifts to each member of the Fellowship prove useful throughout the novel. She also provides Halbarad with the royal standard of Gondor which he brings to Aragorn, who unfurls it upon his arrival at Minas Tirith as a warning to Mordor. Galadriel's power is partly tied to one of the Three Rings and begins to dwindle after the destruction of the One **Ring**, leading to her departure from Middle-earth along with Elrond, Gandalf, Bilbo, and Frodo.

Elrond – Elrond is the Lord of Rivendell and Elladan, Elrohir, and Arwen's father. It's his wisdom that urges Aragorn to consider taking the Paths of the Dead. After Aragorn claims kingship of Gondor, Elrond gives the hand of his daughter, Arwen, to Aragorn in marriage—meaning that Elrond and Arwen must permanently part ways upon Elrond's voyage on the ship from Middle-earth. He is one of the bearers of the Three Rings, and, like Galadriel and Gandalf, his power begins to fade when the One **Ring** is destroyed.

Bilbo Baggins – Bilbo is Frodo's cousin, and his adventures to the Misty Mountains many years ago led to his friendship with Gandalf. A previous bearer of the **Ring**, Bilbo resides in Rivendell as Elrond's guest until the War of the Ring, when his surprising long life and health begin to fade. He leaves Middle-

earth on the ship with Elrond, Gandalf, Galadriel, and Frodo.

Halbarad Dúnadan – Halbarad is one of the Dúnedain Rangers and Aragorn's friend. He and his fellow Rangers catch up with Aragorn on the way to Helm's Deep, delivering both the royal standard of Gondor and advice from Elrond to follow the Paths of the Dead. His presence, along with the other Rangers', seems to catalyze Aragorn's decision to fulfil his destiny as Isildur's heir and claim the kingship of Gondor.

Boromir – Boromir was the first son of Denethor and one of the members of the Fellowship. His death (chronicled in the first book of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy) is one of the sources of Denethor's despair, as Boromir was Denethor's favorite son. Denethor constantly compares the gentler Faramir, who tends to welcome the wisdom of others, with the more stubborn Boromir, who he perceives to have been bolder and more loyal.

Ghân-buri-Ghân – Ghân-buri-Ghân is the chief of the Wild Men of Drúadan Forest. He offers to help the Rohirrim find a secret path to Minas Tirith in return for peace for his people and the destruction of orcs. Though considered strange and unfamiliar by the people of Rohan, he is true to his word. Aragorn rewards him by granting the Wild Men full dominion over the forest.

The Mouth of Sauron – The Mouth of Sauron is Sauron's servant, who greets Aragorn and his army upon their arrival at the Black Gate. His derision, arrogance, and greed are matched by his loyalty to Sauron, who he has been serving for so long that he has forgotten his original name. Despite his self-assurance, he is easily cowed by Aragorn's authority. He retreats behind the Black Gate after Gandalf refuses the terms he offers for Frodo's safe return.

The Chief/Lotho Sackville-Baggins – Lotho is a relative of Frodo and becomes the Chief of the Shire in the period of the four hobbits' absence. His greed makes it easy for Saruman to use him as his puppet, ordering the construction of prisons and mandating new rules throughout the country. Though Lotho isn't well-liked—and referred to as "Pimple" by some hobbits—Frodo knows that he cannot be solely responsible for the destruction done to the Shire, but by the time the Hobbits reach Bag End to confront Lotho, he's been killed by Saruman's servant, Wormtongue.

loreth – loreth is the oldest Healer in the Houses of Healing at Minas Tirith. Her talkative nature gets on both Aragorn and Gandalf's nerves, though her recollection of the phrase that "The hands of the king are the hands of a healer" spurs Gandalf to summon Aragorn to help save Faramir, Merry, and Éowyn from the Dark Shadow.

Bergil – Bergil is the ten-year-old son of Beregond and a friend to Pippin. On Pippin's first day in Minas Tirith, he shows him around the city. When the wagons transport the women and children from Minas Tirith, Bergil stays behind with a few of the other young boys, serving during the battle as an aid to the

Healers. Upon Aragorn's request, he sources a few leaves of kingsfoil that prove vital to Faramir, Merry, and Éowyn's recovery.

Butterbur – Butterbur is the owner of the Prancing Pony, the inn in the village of Bree at which Frodo, Sam, Merry, Pippin, and Gandalf rest on their journey back to the Shire. He is the source of some worrying news for the hobbits, intimating that the Shire is not the same as the way they left it and sharing stories of the ruffians who exert violent authority over Bree. Butterbur's business struggled during the war, but it picks up on the return of the hobbits due to the villagers' curiosity.

Elrohir – Elrohir is one of Elrond's two sons and, along with the Dúnedain Rangers and his brother, Elladan, he rides to battle for Aragorn. He is an Elf of authority, proven by his inclusion in the group called together by Aragorn to advise on the strategy of the march on the Black Gate.

Rosie Cotton – Rosie Cotton is Farmer Cotton's daughter and the hobbit Sam thinks of often when he looks forward to returning home. As the sister of Sam's childhood friends, she's known Sam a long time—long enough to tell him upon his return that he shouldn't wait any longer to marry her. After the wedding, she and Sam move into Bag End to live with Frodo.

Farmer Cotton – Farmer Cotton is a prominent hobbit and Rosie Cotton's father. Sam visits his farm to ask for help in the hobbits' battle against the ruffians, and Farmer Cotton proves vital to the hobbits' fight, standing briefly as a lone challenger before a swarm of hobbits joins him. He informs Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin of the changes that happened in the Shire since their departure, and his optimism is evident when he tells them he knew the hobbits could stand and fight, as long as the right leader came along.

Shadowfax – Shadowfax is the horse Théoden gives to Gandalf after the Rohirrim are unable to tame him. His speed is unmatched by any other horse, and he is treated with great respect by Gandalf, who ensures that the stable in Minas Tirith is fit for his needs. Shadowfax bears Gandalf into battle several times, appearing like a streak of white beneath the **shadow** overhead.

Shagrat – Shagrat is an orc who retrieved Frodo from Shelob's lair. His stubborn obedience to the order not to harm Frodo causes conflict with Gorbag, the leader of a challenging orc faction, and their tussle leads to the members of the two factions slaughtering each other. When Sam confronts Shagrat on his way to rescue Frodo, Shagrat escapes, taking Frodo's mithril-mail shirt to Sauron.

Snaga – Snaga is an orc at Cirith Ungol under Shagrat's command. After disobeying Shagrat, he hides and makes his way up to the top of the tower where he begins to threaten Frodo with torture until Sam arrives. Sam cuts Snaga's arm off, and Snaga eventually dies by falling through the trap-door.

Tree-beard – Tree-beard is the oldest of the Ents, tree-like

beings whose purpose is to protect the forest. After the Ents' victory over Saruman in Isengard, Tree-beard watches over Orthanc, ensuring it is no longer used to evil purposes. However, Tree-beard proves susceptible to Saruman's persuasive language, and, believing Saruman to have lost all his power, allows him to escape Orthanc.

The Mayor of Hobbiton – The Mayor's loyalty to Hobbiton was the driving force in his decision to visit Bag End and share the hobbits' grievances with the Chief, which led to his imprisonment. He has been in prison for months before Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin return to the Shire. Upon his release, he makes Frodo his deputy in order to take some time off to recover. Diplomacy and battle strategy aren't familiar tasks for the Mayor, whose main activities in times of peace are to officiate ceremonies and appear at feasts.

Lobelia Sackville-Baggins – Lobelia is Lotho's mother, who for a while is the Chief of the Shire. Lobelia finds herself imprisoned by Lotho, but her love for him is still apparent upon her release from prison. When she learns he has died, she refuses to return to Bag End, the home they shared after Frodo's departure. Upon her death, she leaves her money to Frodo with the request that he use it to support the hobbits who were treated poorly by Lotho and his ruffians—a display of surprising generosity.

Robin Smallburrow – Robin Smallburrow is one of the hobbit guards who attempts to escort Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin to the Chief's residence for punishment. Sam recognizes him and takes him aside, scolding him for his foolishness in working for the Chief. Through Robin, Sam learns that the guards have no choice but to assist the Chief, though most of them would be willing to rebel under the right conditions.

Bill – Bill is the pony that Sam bought from the corrupt Bill Ferny when the four hobbits' ponies were stolen. Bill's service to the hobbits was so valued that when Sam learns Bill returned to Bree on his own after being set free at the gates of Moria, he asks to be taken to see him immediately. Bill plays a small but significant part in liberating the Shire from the ruffians by kicking Bill Ferny in the backside.

Hirgon – Hirgon is a messenger sent from Gondor to ask Théoden for Rohan's assistance in the battle at Minas Tirith. He carries a red arrow, which marks him out as an official messenger of war. The scouts of the Rohirrim find what appears to be Hirgon's body on the path back to Minas Tirith, because although the head has been removed, the body still holds the red arrow.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Arwen – Arwen is Elrond's daughter and eventually marries Aragorn. Though an Elf, she sacrifices her immortality to be with Aragorn, who is mortal. Arwen's beauty is admired by all who see her.

Isildur – Isildur is one of Aragorn’s ancestors and a former bearer of the **Ring** after taking it from Sauron. His failure to destroy the Ring led to his demise and eventually to Sauron’s return to power.

Elladan – Elladan is one of Elrond’s two sons, and rides to battle for Aragorn alongside the Dúnedain Rangers and his brother, Elrohir. His authority is made evident by his inclusion in the group called together by Aragorn to strategize about the march on the Black Gate.

Gorbag – Gorbag is an orc who challenges Shagrat’s command at Cirith Ungol and attempts to take Frodo’s mithril-mail shirt for himself. Shagrat kills Gorbag, but not before their fighting leads to the members of each faction slaughtering one another in the tower and its courtyard.

Wormtongue – Wormtongue is Saruman’s servant. He appears to have followed Saruman to the Shire, where he continues to serve him. However, Saruman’s continued derision fuels Wormtongue with enough rage to slit his master’s throat, after which the hobbits kill Wormtongue.

Shelob – Shelob is the huge spider who Frodo and Sam encountered on their journey to Mordor. Her venom paralyzed Frodo, leaving him to be found by the patrols of both Shagrat and Gorbag.

Celeborn – Celeborn is Galadriel’s husband and Elrond and Gandalf’s friend. He remains in Lothlórien when Galadriel leaves Middle-earth.

Elanor – Elanor is Sam and Rosie’s first child. When Sam returns to Bag End after seeing Frodo off at the Grey Havens, Rosie puts Elanor on his knee, suggesting that she’s a source of comfort and happiness for him.

Hob – Hob is one of the hobbits guarding the gate to the Shire at the Brandywine Bridge. The hobbits recognize him and persuade him to flout the Chief’s rules by allowing them to stay in the guardhouse overnight.

Forlong – Forlong is the Lord of Lossarnach and one of the first captains to arrive at Minas Tirith to aid in the battle against Mordor. His arrival buoys the people of the city, though their joy is dampened by the fact that he brings significantly fewer troops than expected.



HOPE VS. DESPAIR

At several points throughout *The Return of the King*, characters find themselves in situations that seem to have no chance of success or survival.

Nevertheless, their seemingly irrational displays of hope are eventually rewarded with luck or miracles, while other characters’ surrender to despair is a sign of their certain failure. Denethor is one of those who gives in to hopelessness. Despite Gandalf’s urgings towards optimism and perseverance, Denethor, prompted by plausible yet false visions from the **Seeing Stone**, can foresee no success in the war, and when Faramir returns from Osgiliath on the brink of death, Denethor won’t be persuaded against his decision to burn with his son on the funeral pyre. Denethor thinks the hope of those around him is foolish, and as a result, he ultimately dies alone. His predictions of defeat and of the end of his bloodline are disproved, but he is no longer there to witness others’ hope coming to fruition.

On the other hand, Sam, one of the novel’s most optimistic characters, is constantly propelled by unfounded hope. There is no other way for him but onwards, and so he continues to hope that his and Frodo’s quest will succeed and that they’ll see their friends and their home again. When that second hope seems utterly futile, he still holds onto the first. Sam and Frodo travel to the point of utter exhaustion, and even when all their strength has gone and Mount Doom erupts around them, Sam urges Frodo to find a safer place to stand with him. Indeed, if it weren’t for Sam’s constant efforts to buoy Frodo’s hope, even carrying Frodo when his strength lapses, Frodo likely wouldn’t have reached Mount Doom. Sam’s hope is one of the most necessary factors in the destruction of the **Ring**, implying that apparent logic which leads a person to despair and surrender is less wise, and less useful, than persistent hope that might seem illogical on the surface.



EXPECTATION VS. ABILITY

Several characters throughout the novel demonstrate ability far beyond what’s expected of them. The hobbits are a primary example of this.

Being so small, they’re often mistaken for children and assumed to have childlike qualities: naivete, weakness, and inexperience. Théoden predicts that Merry will be more of a burden than a help in battle, but Merry ends up helping Éowyn defeat the Lord of the Nazgûl. Denethor is bemused by Pippin and unsure of his usefulness, yet Pippin ends up usurping Denethor in order to save Faramir and ensure the line of the stewards of Gondor continues. Denethor says that Gandalf’s plan to send hobbits to Mount Doom to destroy the **Ring** is foolish, but Frodo’s mental and physical strength as a ring bearer and Sam’s bravery in the face of the enemy ensure that their quest is ultimately achieved. Each of the hobbits disproves assumptions made about them due to their size.



THEMES

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

Éowyn, being a woman, faces a similar struggle to disprove what others think about her due to her gender. As a woman, it's assumed her place will be in the home, and when the Rohirrim ride to war, she's left behind to tend to the women and children. She finds she must change her appearance in order to fill the role she wants, and rides to battle at Minas Tirith disguised as a man called Dernhelm. Éowyn's gender actually ends up allowing her to defeat the Lord of the Nazgûl—though he cannot be killed by a man, Éowyn is a woman and so she holds power that a man cannot. Éowyn's subversion of expectations, along with the hobbits' unexpected strengths, prove that status and appearance aren't accurate measures of one's value. A person's value, it seems, comes from within, and indeed an external quality that might be judged a weakness can, as in Éowyn's case, be a unique strength.



LOYALTY, LOVE, AND SACRIFICE

The novel's great triumphs all involve profound sacrifices in the name of love and loyalty. Frodo's task of carrying the **Ring** to Mount Doom ends up leaving him permanently wounded and exhausted by the Ring's weight, yet he proves over the journey that his strength and fortitude are unique and incredibly vital to the success of the free folk in the war. He sacrifices his own health and happiness, and possibly his life, for the love of all his friends and the world he knows. Meanwhile, those around him sacrifice themselves for him: Sam is single-mindedly focused on rescuing Frodo from the orcs and, though he, too, is exhausted at the end of the journey, he carries Frodo partway up the mountain. Aragorn's decision with the captains to ride into a hopeless battle is, in part, a sacrifice made for Frodo's sake, and for the chance of saving the land they love. They don't believe they'll survive, but their love and loyalty give them the strength to sacrifice themselves anyway. Similarly, Arwen's marriage to Aragorn represents sacrifice for the sake of romantic love. When she becomes bound to Aragorn, who though blessed with long life is still mortal, she gives up the possibility of leaving Middle-earth to travel to the immortal lands with the rest of the Elves, and must bid farewell to her father, Elrond, without ever hoping to see him again. By valorizing such characters' choices, Tolkien suggests that love and loyalty—especially when devoted to others' good—are worth sacrificing one's own safety, or even one's life, for.



POWER, WISDOM, AND MERCY

Throughout the novel, when a character has the power to decide another character's fate, they often choose to show mercy rather than dole out harsh punishment. Aragorn's style of leadership is built on mercy: when some of his men approach Mordor and are too terrified to go on, he releases them from their obligation. Rather than making him seem soft and weakening his authority,

this display of mercy encourages more loyalty from his men, and even persuades some of them to continue following him despite their fear. Once the war has ended, one of Aragorn's first acts as king is to make peace with the nations of men who fought on Sauron's side, demonstrating that his mercy works in harmony with his desire for peace and supports his wise leadership.

Mercy is also a huge factor in the success of Frodo's quest. After wearing and carrying the **Ring**, Sam understands how profoundly it corrupts those who bear it. This newfound wisdom means he orders Gollum to leave instead of killing him on Mount Doom, no matter how treacherous Gollum has proven himself to be, or how often Sam has dreamed of throttling him. Though this almost ends in the total failure of Frodo's quest when Gollum makes his final attack in the heart of the mountain, ultimately Sam's wise assessment of Gollum as a creature totally ruined by the Ring, and his resulting mercy, leads to the destruction of the Ring even when that seems impossible. In this way, Tolkien suggests that mercy is often a sign of wisdom, not weakness, and that an act of mercy can bring unpredicted luck or fortune.



WAR, GREED, AND NATURE

The best-equipped and strongest armies throughout the novel are also those who cause the most destruction to the natural world. Mordor's atmosphere is one of the clearest examples of this. Smog, filth, and stench cover Mordor and obscure the sky as a result of Sauron's constant production of troops, armor, and weapons. Sauron's success in war is built upon the destruction of the land around him, to the point where no living thing can survive in parts of that country. When the hobbits return home to the Shire, they find a similar scene developing. Saruman's puppet, Lotho, has been encouraged in his greed to build huge, ugly houses and a belching, calamitous mill, and the ruffians serving him have cut down all the trees in order to build their lodgings. However, natural beauty seems to transcend this destruction. Even in Mordor, Sam looks up to see a bright star shining through the cloud. And though the ruffians, led by Saruman, tore down trees and polluted the river of the Shire, the hobbits are able to recover and preserve their country's beauty. In fact, Sam, aided by Galadriel's gift of Elvish dust, cultivates beautiful trees where the previous ones were cut down, including a mallorn, a tree never before seen outside of the Elvish lands. Tolkien suggests that nature, even when obscured or destroyed, finds a way to spring back anew, always stronger than the engines of war and greed.



SYMBOLS

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



THE RING

The Ring symbolizes intense desire, which the novel suggests allows evil to thrive. Also called the One Ring (to distinguish it from the other Rings of Power), the Ring was forged by Sauron and is the object upon which his life and power depend. Each bearer of the Ring is corrupted by its temptation of greatness and domination; even a hobbit like Sam, whose aim in life is only to be a gardener and live in comfort, envisions his existence as a fearsome ruler of Middle-earth while carrying the Ring. The Ring brings tragedy to those who can't resist its promise of greatness: Gollum, whose existence since losing the Ring has been reduced to a desperate desire to find it again, dies as soon as he takes it from Frodo—and Sauron, who cannot fathom that anyone would want to see the Ring destroyed, is destroyed along with it. The Ring seems to corrupt its bearer by augmenting their greed and forcing them to become dependent on it, which means that Frodo's ability to carry it over such a long journey is due to his humility and his lack of desire to control anyone else.



THE SHADOW

The shadow symbolizes the hopelessness and dread of war. It takes the form of a dark cloud that Sauron sends over the lands of Middle-earth to provide darkness for his light-intolerant armies and to obscure his enemies' sight and awareness. The shadow completely blocks out the sun, causing many in Gondor and Rohan to wonder whether the dawn has arrived—or if it ever will. Its presence brings gloom and despair over the people it covers, echoing their lack of hope as they approach a seemingly inevitable defeat. However, it is an inadvertent source of stealth for the Rohirrim, who find they can move quickly under its cover without being noticed by enemy troops, and even at the shadow's darkest, Sam sees a glint of a star through it. Ultimately, though the shadow symbolizes overwhelming hopelessness, it is never able to completely obscure the few signs of hope that can be found in the most unlikely places.



THE SEEING STONES

The Seeing Stones symbolize the danger of assumption and miscommunication. The Stones, also called Palantíri, are devices which allow people within Middle-earth to send visual images to each other instantly. Though they cannot present artificial or objectively untrue images, the meaning of each dispatch depends on how its recipient interprets a given image. For instance, Aragorn is able to present himself to Sauron, one of the keepers of the Stones, through imagery that suggests the heir to Gondor's throne has returned. While this is true, Aragorn is, at the time of his message, far from Gondor and without the support of many

troops; yet, upon seeing these images, Sauron hastens his attack on Minas Tirith in fear of the new heir's power. Like Sauron, Denethor believes himself to be a master of the Stones. When his son, Faramir, returns from the battle at Osgiliath badly wounded, Denethor retreats to ponder the Stone's message. When the Stone shows him images of Mordor's far-reaching and overwhelming power, Denethor descends into despair, believing what he has seen to be Gondor's death knell. Taking images received through the Stones at face value overwhelmingly proves to be foolish at best and fatal at worst, highlighting the dangers of drawing conclusions from incomplete messages.



THE WHITE TREE

The White Tree of Gondor acts as a symbol of hope, and when it appears to have withered and died in the courtyard of Minas Tirith's Citadel, it stands as a sign that Men are on the brink of hopelessness. The fate of Gondor's people appears to be bound to the fate of the White Tree, as suggested by their livery which bears the tree's image. When Aragorn claims kingship, he wrestles with the threat of his line ending and of Gondor falling into ruin. However, Gandalf takes him to a secret mountain field to show him that a White Tree sapling, a descendant of the current White Tree in the courtyard, is growing, by some miracle, in the snow. Aragorn takes this sapling and replaces the withered Tree with it to signify that his descendancy, and Gondor's future, have a strong hope of flourishing.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Del Rey edition of *The Return of the King* published in 1986.

Book 5, Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ “But I will say this: the rule of no realm is mine, neither of Gondor nor any other, great or small. But all worthy things that are in peril as the world now stands, those are my care. And for my part, I shall not wholly fail of my task, though Gondor should perish, if anything passes through this night that can still grow fair or bear fruit and flower again in days to come. For I also am a steward. Did you not know?”

Related Characters: Gandalf (speaker), Frodo Baggins, Samwise Gamgee (Sam), Denethor, Shadowfax

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Though Gandalf has come to Minas Tirith to advise Denethor in battle, Denethor proves stubborn and unreceptive. He reminds Gandalf that his loyalty is to Gondor alone; he knows Gondor best, and he won't risk any action that could put it in jeopardy. Gandalf is frustrated by Denethor's closed-mindedness. He has a larger goal: the protection of anything innocent and beautiful that can be protected, even if ancient kingdoms are defeated along the way.

Gandalf's claim to stewardship highlights the fact that he takes his role as a protector seriously, as he's shown in his friendship with less powerful beings (especially Shadowfax and the hobbits). It also suggests that his decision to send Frodo and Sam to Mordor weighs heavily on him, and it foreshadows his efforts to protect them as best he can.

Gandalf also places hope in the survival of nature. Even if all that's left in the ruin of war is a single bloom, as he sees it, that is a victory. At the very least, he hopes that nature will prove stronger than the greed and destruction of war.


Book 5, Chapter 2 Quotes

☝☝ “All your words are but to say: you are a woman, and your part is in the house. But when the men have died in battle and honour, you have leave to be burned in the house, for the men will need it no more. But I am of the House of Eorl and not a serving-woman. I can ride and wield blade, and I do not fear either pain or death.”

“What do you fear, lady?” he asked.

“A cage,” she said. “To stay behind bars, until use and old age accept them, and all chance of doing great deeds is gone beyond recall or desire.”

Related Characters: Aragorn/Strider, Éowyn/Dernhelm (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

When Aragorn refuses to bring Éowyn with him and his company through the Paths of the Dead, she's frustrated by the fact that she's always given the traditional feminine roles of caring and homemaking instead of being allowed to ride to war. She knows she has skills beyond the domestic setting—her noble heritage means she's as brave and valuable in battle as any of the men around her. Battle, and


its risk of death, is not what threatens Éowyn. Her fear is to miss her chance to prove her bravery, constrained by the expectations placed on women.

Éowyn's description of her life as a cage with bars displays her desperate unhappiness in the role she's been given. She worries that if she doesn't escape, eventually she'll resign herself to captivity. Even as the highest-ranking woman in the kingdom of Rohan, Éowyn's gender excludes her from freedom, and as her beloved friends and family ride into battle, her frustration is becoming distilled into a death wish for herself.

Book 5, Chapter 3 Quotes

☝☝ He sat for a moment half dreaming, listening to the noise of water, the whisper of dark trees, the crack of stone, and the vast waiting silence that brooded behind all sound. He loved mountains, or he had loved the thought of them marching on the edge of stories brought from far away; but now he was borne down by the insupportable weight of Middle-earth. He longed to shut out the immensity in a quiet room by a fire.

Related Characters: Meriadoc Brandybuck (Merry)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 56



Explanation and Analysis


Upon arriving at Dunharrow, Merry reflects on the sheer size of the world he's experienced since leaving the Shire. As a hobbit at home, he relished the thought of adventure, finding joy in the idea of huge mountains. But now he's in the midst of the wide world, and he realizes the scale of it all. Before, the hugeness of forests and mountains was peripheral—a beautiful part of the scenery of the journeys he imagined—but now, he has to face up to the vastness alone, without his friends, and without really understanding the war he's heading into.

This is the moment that Merry realizes his helplessness. He's a tiny part of a huge world, and that thought seems to crush him: he wishes he could be cozy and indoors, in a single room instead of in an oppressively large open space. The passage suggests that danger and adventure appear enticing from a place of safety and comfort, yet when one's caught in danger, safety and comfort are all one wants.

☛ The world was darkling. The very air seemed brown, and all things about were black and grey and shadowless; there was a great stillness. No shape of cloud could be seen, unless it were far away westward, where the furthest groping fingers of gloom still crawled onwards and a little light leaked through them. Overhead there hung a heavy roof, sombre and featureless, and light seemed rather to be failing than growing.

Related Characters: Sauron, Meriadoc Brandybuck (Merry)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 66-67

Explanation and Analysis

When Merry wakes up in Dunharrow, he's confused by the lack of light. The sun has risen, but it's hard to tell, because a shadow has blocked out all the light from the sky. The shadow isn't a cloud, exactly; it's more of a thick, unnatural smog, darkening and obscuring not only sight but sound, too.

The shadow flattens everything into the same indistinct color. It's impenetrable and so, it seems, is the despair it brings with it: a monochrome, spirit-dampening dullness. This passage's description of the shadow as a "roof" emphasizes its oppressive quality, suggesting everyone caught under the shadow has been blocked off from the sky and its beauty and freedom.

Not only is the shadow ugly and impermeable, but it's also growing greedily as if it's a reaching hand. This implies that the shadow is a manifestation of Sauron's desire to reach across the whole of Middle-earth, claiming and polluting every foot of land.

Page Number: 74


Explanation and Analysis

After Pippin has been fitted in the livery of a Guard of the City, he feels uncomfortable and weighed down. Though he only arrived in Minas Tirith yesterday, it seems like years since he first explored the city. Now, he's fully immersed in the war, a small but important part of the defense of Minas Tirith.

Pippin's armor and official role as Guard have changed his identity dramatically. He feels that he has become a soldier and is thus no longer a hobbit—suggesting that the two identities have nothing to do with each other, and that he's transformed completely since leaving the Shire. While before, he was a traveler, experiencing things from the outside and not taking much of it too seriously, he's now begun to feel the full weight of the danger and his responsibility to defend against it.

The war has forced Pippin to sacrifice his carefree nature in order to carry out his role and caused him to realize his status as a single cog in a dedicated machine rather than an enigmatic outsider. The passage suggests that even the smallest and least powerful beings are implicated in, and can contribute to, the violence of war.

☛ All about the streets and lanes behind the Gate it tumbled down, small round shot that did not burn. But when men ran to learn what it might be, they cried aloud or wept. For the enemy was firing into the City all the heads of those who had fallen fighting at Osgiliath, or on the Rammas, or in the fields. They were grim to look on; [...] many had features that could be told, and it seemed that they had died in pain; and all were branded with the foul token of the Lidless Eye. But marred and dishonoured as they were, it often chanced that thus a man would see again the face of someone that he had known, who had walked proudly once in arms, or tilled the fields, or ridden upon a holiday from the green vales in the hills.

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 92



Explanation and Analysis

Mordor's armies have besieged Minas Tirith. After firing explosives into the city and causing destruction and chaos, they begin to use the catapults to fire the heads of Gondor's soldiers killed in the previous outer battles. While these cause less destruction—they're smaller and don't

Book 5, Chapter 4 Quotes

☛ Already it seemed years to Pippin since he had sat there before, in some half-forgotten time when he had still been a hobbit, a half-hearted wanderer touched little by the perils he had passed through. Now he was one small soldier in a city preparing for a great assault, clad in the proud but sombre manner of the Tower of the Guard.

Related Characters: Peregrin Took (Pippin)

Related Themes:  

combust—the shock and horror when the men realize what they are is equally brutal.


The appearance of these heads—and the enemy’s use of them as gratuitous weapons—suggests that this is total war in every way. There’s no honor for the dead in battle; instead, they’re treated as objects and reused to the enemy’s advantage. And when these men’s heads appear at the feet of their fellow soldiers, it’s a reminder of what’s at stake. The soldiers are losing not only comrades but friends, and the stakes of the battle grow larger thanks to the memories of peacetime that the face of their friends trigger. This war could take everything from the people of Gondor: not only their lives, but the beauty and joy of the country they are fighting for.

Book 5, Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ His golden shield was uncovered, and lo! it shone like an image of the Sun, and the grass flamed into green about the white feet of his steed. For morning came, morning and a wind from the sea; and darkness was removed, and the hosts of Mordor wailed, and terror took them, and they fled, and died, and the hoofs of wrath rode over them.

Related Characters: Théoden

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

When Théoden leads the Rohirrim into battle at Minas Tirith, he rides with such speed and fervor that none of his soldiers are able to overtake him. As he rides, the world around him seems to come vibrantly to life. He and his army bring radiance and hope to the shadowed battlefield, and their strength on horseback allows them to trample the enemy’s front lines and present a significant threat.


Théoden’s valor is tied to images of sun and fresh grass: his shield shines like the sun, which is currently obscured by the shadow of Mordor. And the grass, trampled by armies and the site of burning and violence, is lush and verdant along his horse’s path. This imagery suggests that victory in battle comes hand in hand with the flourishing of the natural world, which has been threatened by the destruction that comes with war. It also implies that Rohan’s strength and courage is vital to Gondor’s survival: only with their arrival can the darkness be broken.

Book 5, Chapter 6 Quotes

☞ “Hinder me? Thou fool. No living man may hinder me!”

Then Merry heard of all sounds in that hour the strangest. It seemed that Dernhelm laughed, and the clear voice was like the ring of steel. “But no living man am I! You look upon a woman. Éowyn am I, Éomund’s daughter. You stand between me and my lord and kin. Begone, if you be not deathless! For living or dark undead, I will smite you, if you touch him.”

Related Characters: Éowyn/Dernhelm, Lord of the Nazgûl (speaker), Meriadoc Brandybuck (Merry), Théoden

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

Éowyn confronts the Lord of the Nazgûl on the battlefield in defense of Théoden, Rohan’s king, who for most of Éowyn’s life served as her father. This is the moment she went to battle for—a chance to protect the ones she loves and prove her own skill and bravery. The Lord of the Nazgûl is secure in the fact that he cannot be hurt or killed by a man, but Éowyn, being a woman, has a unique advantage against him.



This passage proves Éowyn’s willingness to sacrifice herself on the battlefield against an ancient and extremely powerful enemy. That willingness comes from two places: first, the love and loyalty she feels for her king and father figure, Théoden; second, her desperation to break out of the domestic cage she’s been trapped in her whole life. It transpires that Éowyn’s refusal of the expectations of women in her society leads to the vital defeat of Sauron’s second in command, which suggests that those gender-based expectations do not need to be blindly obeyed.


Book 5, Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ “[O]ne at least of the Seven Seeing Stones was preserved. In the days of his wisdom Denethor would not presume to use it to challenge Sauron, knowing the limits of his own strength. But his wisdom failed; and I fear that as the peril of his realm grew he looked in the Stone and was deceived: far too often, I guess, since Boromir departed. He was too great to be subdued to the will of the Dark Power, he saw nonetheless only those things which that Power permitted him to see. The knowledge which he obtained was, doubtless, often of service to him; yet the vision of the great might of Mordor that was shown to him fed the despair of his heart until it overthrew his mind.”

Related Characters: Gandalf (speaker), Sauron, Denethor,

Boromir

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

Gandalf realizes that Denethor's unrelenting and chaotic despair was spurred on, or even partly caused by, his use of one of the Seeing Stones. Denethor was once able to resist the temptation to look in the Stone, but in his grief and desperation after losing Boromir and seeing his kingdom begin to crumble, he lost sight of his own limitations and began to consult the Stone frequently.


Though Denethor was still strong and wise, able to resist the full evil of Sauron, his use of the Stone allowed him to see images of Mordor's strength that caused him to believe Gondor had no hope in the war. Even though he still possessed reason and logic, the fear caused by these images proved stronger. This passage suggests that a large part of wisdom is knowing one's own limits. When Denethor began to presume himself more powerful than he really was, he began to draw conclusions beyond his foresight. His prediction of failure left him unable to strategize or fight, which also points to how hope and despair function within the world of the novel: hope, even in defiance of seemingly impossible odds, will at least aid an *attempt* at victory, whereas despair acts a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, adding apathy to hopelessness and guaranteeing defeat.

Book 5, Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ “Alas! For she was pitted against a foe beyond the strength of her mind or body. And those who will take a weapon to such an enemy must be sterner than steel, if the very shock shall not destroy them. It was an evil doom that set her in this path. For she is a fair maiden, fairest lady of a house of queens. And yet I know not how I should speak of her. When I first looked on her and perceived her unhappiness, it seemed to me that I saw a white flower standing straight and proud, shapely as a lily, and yet knew that it was hard, as if wrought by elf-wrights out of steel. Or was it, maybe, a frost that had turned its sap to ice, and so it stood, bitter-sweet, still fair to see, but stricken, soon to fall and die?”

Related Characters: Aragorn/Strider (speaker), Éowyn/Dernhelm, Lord of the Nazgûl

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 145


Explanation and Analysis

Aragorn finds Éowyn afflicted by the Dark Shadow in the Houses of Healing. He knows he can heal her, at least physically—but he's unsure how well she will recover if she wakes up feeling as hopeless as she did all her life. Her defeat of the Lord of the Nazgûl exhausted every bit of strength she had, demanding a huge amount of mental fortitude, and she only ended up in that position because of her wish to die on the battlefield.

Aragorn has been aware of Éowyn's despair since he first met her. Though he knew she was beautiful and noble, he could also tell she was stubborn and brittle—like steel or ice—and that her anger and sadness would lead her into danger. This passage demonstrates Éowyn's struggle with the gentleness and beauty expected of her as a noble woman. She has always rejected what's expected of her, for instance, rejecting softness in favor of strength. Because she has had to fight so hard to embody the values of bravery and valor, she has ended up on the verge of death, which reflects how uncompromising the expectations are of women in this society, and the drastic measures required to overcome them.

☞ “Do not be afraid,” said Aragorn. “I came in time, and I have called him back. He is weary now, and grieved, and he has taken a hurt like the Lady Éowyn, daring to smite that deadly thing. But these evils can be amended, so strong and gay a spirit is in him. His grief he will not forget; but it will not darken his heart, it will teach him wisdom.”

Related Characters: Aragorn/Strider (speaker), Meriadoc Brandybuck (Merry), Éowyn/Dernhelm, Lord of the Nazgûl

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

Though Merry, like Éowyn, has been afflicted with the Black Shadow due to his attack against the Lord of the Nazgûl, his recovery won't be so treacherous. This is due to his



disposition: while Éowyn lived a life of desperation and frustration, always struggling against her role and identity, Merry's life was until recently a joyous one, his outlook similarly buoyant. Though not all traces of his hardship will leave him once he recovers, he won't be weighed down by them—rather, the memory of danger and the grief of his losses will make him wiser.


Merry's recovery will be helped along by his inherent joyfulness, which highlights the value of hope even in the midst of war. Éowyn's despair will make it more difficult for her health and strength to return, implying that despair weakens the body as much as it does the spirit. Meanwhile, Merry is strengthened by his joy. It seems that his grief and hope can coexist, neither cancelling the other out and each increasing his strength and wisdom.

Book 5, Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ “We must walk open-eyed into that trap, with courage, but small hope for ourselves. For, my lords, it may well prove that we ourselves shall perish utterly in a black battle far from the living lands; so that even if Barad-dûr be thrown down, we shall not live to see a new age. But this, I deem, is our duty. And better so than to perish nonetheless—as we surely shall if we sit here—and know as we die that no new age shall be.”

Related Characters: Gandalf (speaker), Frodo Baggins, Samwise Gamgee (Sam), Aragorn/Strider, Denethor

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 162

Explanation and Analysis

Gandalf advises Aragorn and the captains to form an army and march on Mordor's Black Gate. There's no hope that they'll defeat Mordor's huge numbers and strength—they've already been decimated on the battlefield and still have to spare troops to defend Minas Tirith. This strategy is a sacrifice for an unlikely hope—certainly something Denethor would've advised against as foolishness.

Gandalf's hope comes from the chance that, in their sacrifice, Aragorn and his army might allow Frodo and Sam to complete their quest to destroy the Ring. This is by no means a sure thing, but Gandalf sees it as his duty—and the duty of all who are able—to die defending the hope of survival for even a few free people than to die in hopeless


inaction. They may not profit from their courage or efforts, but if some others might, then the sacrifice won't be in vain.

Book 6, Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ In that hour of trial it was the love of his master that helped most to hold him firm; but also deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense: he knew in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden, even if such visions were not a mere cheat to betray him. The one small garden of a free gardener was all his need a due, not a garden swollen to a realm; his own hands to use, not the hands of others to command.

Related Characters: Frodo Baggins, Samwise Gamgee (Sam), Sauron

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 186



Explanation and Analysis


Sam finds that his short time carrying the Ring has planted delusions of grandeur in his mind. After envisioning himself as a leader of all in Middle-earth, he realizes that it's only the Ring that has encouraged those ambitions—they don't suit him at all.

The two things that ground Sam and protect him from the Ring's temptation are firstly his love for Frodo—he needs to focus on saving Frodo rather than getting distracted by the ephemeral promises of the Ring—and secondly his contentment with his life's purpose. It's enough for Sam to think of his role as a gardener, controlling only himself and caring for only his patch of land. He has no desire to command anyone else or presume himself more important than the life he's been given. Sam's wisdom and strength come from his ability to be satisfied by that which he can understand and master, and to steer clear of ambitions to claim that which doesn't belong to him. In this humble way, he's wiser than Sauron, whose arrogance and lust for power lead to his own downfall.

☛ *Though here at journey's end I lie
in darkness buried deep,
beyond all towers strong and high,
beyond all mountains steep,
above all shadows rides the Sun
and Stars for ever dwell:
I will not say the Day is done,
nor bid the Stars farewell.*

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

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

Sam, having climbed to the top of the tower of Cirith Ungol, can't figure out how to reach Frodo. He sits down, exhausted and desperate, and begins to sing old Shire tunes with his own words put to them. This song, fresh from Sam's mind, reflects his outlook on his journey. He feels that he's reached the end of hope and can't see the way forward. Yet even when he's buried in darkness, Sam thinks of the sun and stars which can't be erased by the shadow of evil.


Sam refuses, against all logic, and against even his exhaustion and hopelessness, to give up on the journey. Even when he feels it's the end, beauty keeps going, and so does life: he won't surrender, even if the way is unclear or impossible. Indeed, his song—a part of that continuing beauty itself—prompts Frodo to sing in response, which leads Sam to the trapdoor to find him. His hope, buoyed by his assurance in beauty's survival and continuation, carves out his path forward and toward Frodo.

Book 6, Chapter 3 Quotes

☛ Sam guessed that among all their pains he bore the worst, the growing weight of the Ring, a burden on the body and a torment to his mind. Anxiously Sam had noted how his master's left hand would often be raised as if to ward off a blow, or to screen his shrinking eyes from a dreadful Eye that sought to look in them. And sometimes his right hand would creep to his breast, clutching, and then slowly, as the will recovered mastery, it would be withdrawn.

Related Characters: Frodo Baggins, Samwise Gamgee (Sam), Sauron

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

Though Frodo and Sam have endured physical and mental pain for days, both suffering a lack of food and water on top of their wounds and exhaustion, Sam knows that Frodo's burden of the Ring is the hardest of the struggles between them. It's not only mental torture but unbearably heavy in a tangible way.


Frodo seems to have become subconsciously defensive, as his body language demonstrates. As the bearer of the Ring, he's the object of Sauron's desire and surveillance, and though Sauron is still far away in the tower of Barad-dûr, to Frodo it's as if he's close enough to land a blow. With increased proximity to its master, the Ring's strength has grown, and the spirit of Sauron imbued within it has become increasingly impossible to ignore.

While Frodo's left hand is acting, seemingly on its own accord, as a shield, his right hand repeatedly reaches toward his chest, where the Ring hangs on its chain. The temptation of the Ring has become embedded in Frodo's thought patterns and his desire to wear it is now second nature. It's a testament to his strength and endurance that he still has enough self-control to overrule this perpetual, potent urge.

☛ Sam's hand wavered. His mind was hot with wrath and the memory of evil. It would be just to slay this treacherous, murderous creature, just and many times deserved; and also it seemed the only safe thing to do. But deep in his heart there was something that restrained him: he could not strike this thing lying in the dust, forlorn, ruinous, utterly wretched. He himself, though only for a while, had borne the Ring, and now dimly he guessed the agony of Gollum's shrivelled mind and body, enslaved to that Ring, unable to find peace or relief ever in life again.

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

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

When the hobbits are only steps away from the chasm of Mount Doom, Gollum catches up with them and attacks Frodo, attempting to take the Ring. Frodo, in a surprising show of strength, beats Gollum back and escapes up the mountain, leaving Sam to decide what to do with Gollum. Sam has had the desire to kill Gollum since he learned of his betrayal, and in this moment, he has the perfect chance to do so.

This passage makes an important distinction between Sam's surface feelings of anger and revenge, and his core beliefs which tend towards sympathy and mercy. Having worn and carried the Ring for just a few hours, Sam already knows the overwhelming power it has over one's desires and actions. So he infers that Gollum, having possessed the Ring for many years, must have been truly ruined by it. This is something Sam finally understands, and when previously he might not have thought twice about killing Gollum, his decision here is to show mercy. Despite his anger and even his logic, Sam knows that killing Gollum—already a wretched, desperate creature—is not up to him. Ultimately, it's Sam's mercy in this moment, and his awareness that judging the fates of others is outside his purview, that leads to the destruction of both Gollum and the Ring.

However, Faramir's love for her, and his understanding of her desires and fears not from a position of pity but one of empathy, seems to have softened her outlook.

Éowyn begins to realize that the value of a life spent caring and protecting may be acceptable to her. It's not entirely clear why her attitude has changed so completely in such a short time, but it may be a product of her near-death experience, coupled with her newfound love for Faramir. In any case, she has stopped struggling against a more domestic life and made peace with her position and status as a woman, able now to appreciate the worth of beauty and growth where before she only found satisfaction in the thought of killing others and sacrificing herself.

☞ “Turn your face from the green world, and look where all seems barren and cold!” said Gandalf.



Then Aragorn turned, and there was a stony slope behind him running down from the skirts of the snow; and as he looked he was aware that alone there in the waste a growing thing stood. And he climbed to it, and saw that out of the very edge of the snow there sprang a sapling tree no more than three foot high. Already it had put forth young leaves long and shapely, dark above and silver beneath, and upon its slender crown it bore one small cluster of flowers whose white petals shone like the sunlit snow.


Book 6, Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ Then the heart of Éowyn changed, or else at last she understood it. And suddenly her winter passed, and the sun shone on her.

“I stand in Minas Anor, the Tower of the Sun,” she said; “and behold! the Shadow has departed! I will be a shieldmaiden no longer, nor vie with the great Riders, nor take joy only in the songs of slaying. I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren.”

Related Characters: Éowyn/Dernhelm (speaker), Faramir

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 


Page Number: 262

Explanation and Analysis

Éowyn has spent days recovering from her affliction of the Dark Shadow, and over that time her frustration with the life she anticipates—not martyred on the battlefield, but restored to her domestic place as a woman—has grown.

Related Characters: Gandalf (speaker), Samwise Gamgee (Sam), Aragorn/Strider, Arwen

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 270

Explanation and Analysis

Aragorn has been harboring concerns about the end of his bloodline and the fate of Gondor. Though he's waiting for the day when he marries Arwen, he has no children as yet, and feels uncertain about the continuity of peace in Gondor. Gandalf asks Aragorn to look around him. Though they're standing in the mountains in a patch of snow and grit, there's a young tree growing out of the ground—a descendant of the White Tree that's withered in the Citadel courtyard.

The survival of the White Tree in the seemingly barren mountain earth suggests Aragorn can have hope in the survival of his bloodline, and in the flourishing of Gondor even after years of turmoil. It's also a more general symbol

of the strength of nature, similar to Sam's realization when he sees a star appearing through the shadow in Mordor: in its combination of hardiness and beauty, nature can outlast violence and destruction and prevail against all odds.

Book 6, Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ Then the hobbits suddenly realized that people had looked at them with amazement not out of surprise at their return so much as in wonder at their gear. They themselves had become so used to warfare and to riding in well-arrayed companies that they had quite forgotten that the bright mail peeping from under their cloaks, and the helms of Gondor and the Mark, and the fair devices of their shields, would seem outlandish in their own country.

Related Characters: Frodo Baggins, Samwise Gamgee (Sam), Peregrin Took (Pippin), Meriadoc Brandybuck (Merry)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 294

Explanation and Analysis

When Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin return to Bree—the village they stopped in on their journey from the Shire to Rivendell about a year ago—they find they're treated differently than they once were. They first think that it's because people recognize them and are surprised to see them back, but then they realize they're wearing armor and carrying weapons, which is very unusual for hobbits.

This is the moment in which the four hobbits realize how much they've changed on their journeys. While their armor and weapons are only one small part of their transformations, they visually represent a wealth of experience, a great distance of traveling, and the fact that they've mingled with, and have been honored by, people beyond their own kind. The fact that they're all slow to realize that they stand out suggests that none of them ever presumed themselves to have changed or grown beyond their core identities as hobbits. Among Men and Elves, they were always distinct because of their size. Now they've returned to the land of their own kind, they're unusual too—they're perhaps not as hobbit-like as they once were.

☞ “Well here we are, just the four of us that started out together,” said Merry. “We have left all the rest behind, one after another. It seems almost like a dream that has slowly faded.”

“Not to me,” said Frodo. “To me it feels more like falling asleep again.”

Related Characters: Frodo Baggins, Meriadoc Brandybuck (Merry) (speaker), Samwise Gamgee (Sam), Gandalf, Peregrin Took (Pippin)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 299

Explanation and Analysis



When the four hobbits depart Bree without Gandalf, it's the first time just the four of them are together again. They left the other surviving members of the Fellowship behind on their journey back to the Shire. Soon to be surrounded by a familiar landscape and, he presumes, the comforts of home, Merry feels that he's waking up to his real life again. The journey seems like a dream that began upon leaving the Shire and will end upon his return, almost as if real life were put on pause and will now resume.

Frodo feels differently. To him, returning home feels less like waking up and more like falling asleep. This suggests that his journey to Mordor was more vivid, and felt more real, than anything he experienced in his former life in the Shire. It also implies that the journey has transformed him profoundly, so that he cannot wake up to the same life he left behind. The effect of the quest on his body, and on his mind, isn't something he can forget about or ignore, and to attempt to do so will be like living in a dream.

Book 6, Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ This was Frodo and Sam's own country, and they found out now that they cared about it more than any other place in the world. Many of the houses that they had known were missing. Some seemed to have been burned down. The pleasant row of old hobbit-holes in the bank on the north side of the Pool were deserted, and their little gardens that used to run down bright to the water's edge were rank with weeds. Worse, there was a whole line of ugly new houses all along Pool Side, where the Hobbiton Road ran close to the bank. An avenue of trees had stood there. They were all gone. And looking with dismay up the road towards Bag End they saw a tall chimney of brick in the distance. It was pouring out black smoke into the evening air.

Related Characters: Frodo Baggins, Samwise Gamgee (Sam), Saruman/Sharkey, The Chief/Lotho Sackville-Baggins

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 307

Explanation and Analysis


The hobbits returned to the Shire to find it's been taken over by the Chief, whose ruffians have set to work destroying some of the most beautiful hobbit-holes, ripping down trees, and building ugly new houses and a huge new mill. The ugliness is not only aesthetically insulting but is a huge blow to Frodo and Sam, to whom Hobbiton is precious. Though they've adventured through stunning places like Rivendell and Minas Tirith, their home is still the most beautiful place to them, and its destruction causes them great pain.

The changes made to the Shire highlight the essence of greed and its disregard for beauty. Instead of protecting and preserving the homes and gardens that already exist, the ruffians have trampled over what's precious. It transpires that this choice to let the existing homes fall into ruin is Saruman's work. Mirroring his destruction of Fangorn Forest and his desire for power, Saruman's greed has polluted the Shire for the sake of production and profit. The fact that Saruman has brought ugliness and filth into the Shire, one of the most pleasant and peaceful places in Middle-earth, proves that even though he's lost virtually all power, he'll continue to stoop lower and lower to fulfil his stubborn ambitions.

“But I've a bone to pick with you, in a manner o' speaking, if I may make so bold. You didn't never ought to have a' sold Bag End, as I always said. That's what started all the mischief. And while you've been trapessing in foreign parts, chasing Black Men up mountains from what my Sam says, though what for he don't make clear, they've been and dug up Bagshot Row and ruined my taters!”

“I am very sorry, Mr. Gamgee,” said Frodo. “But now I've come back, I'll do my best to make amends.”

Related Characters: Frodo Baggins (speaker), Samwise Gamgee (Sam), The Chief/Lotho Sackville-Baggins

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 319


Explanation and Analysis

When Sam brings his father back to the Cottons' farm, his father berates Frodo for selling Bag End to the Sackville-Bagginses, which, he believes, allowed Lotho to become as powerful as he is. Sam's father doesn't understand why Frodo and the other hobbits were gone, or what they did on their journey. He has no idea about the Ring, or Sauron, or the war—his priority is with his potatoes, his garden and his home.

Sam's father's outlook reflects that of most hobbits: they're generally content with their small, provincial lives until danger is on their doorsteps. It's clear that Frodo and his companions have returned to a country that has been largely untouched by the war that had such profound effects on the four of them, and as a consequence there'll be things that the hobbits around them will never understand. Instead of expressing any frustration about this, Frodo is gracious in responding to Sam's father with care and good humor. Though his quest was vital to the survival of the Shire, the hobbits there don't realize that. And rather than inform Sam's father of this, Frodo humbly and simply remains loyal to the Shire and helps with its survival and restoration as much as he can.

“No, Sam!” said Frodo. “Do not kill him even now. For he has not hurt me. And in any case I do not wish him to be slain in this evil mood. He was great once, of a noble kind that we should not dare to raise our hands against. He is fallen, and his cure is beyond us; but I would still spare him, in the hope that he may find it.”

Related Characters: Frodo Baggins (speaker), Samwise Gamgee (Sam), Saruman/Sharkey

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 325

Explanation and Analysis

Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin arrive at Bag End to find Lotho, but there's no trace of him. Instead, Saruman arrives and reveals himself as the master of the ruffians. The other hobbits urge Frodo to kill Saruman, but he refuses, demanding instead that Saruman leave without violence. When Saruman attempts to hurt Frodo, Sam draws his sword. But Frodo tells Sam not to kill Saruman—especially not out of anger and revenge. Saruman was once a great and respected wizard, and though he's lost all pride, it's not up to the hobbits to decide his death.

Even though Frodo has endured a huge amount of cruelty and pain and has witnessed the destruction of the whole realm of Mordor, he holds out hope for Saruman's redemption. He understands his role as a protector of the Shire but refuses to act as an executioner—it's not his place to decide whether someone deserves to die. This passage once again demonstrates Frodo's humility and self-awareness, even after his hard-won victory in the war. It also illustrates Frodo's hopeful nature: though he understands it's not likely that Saruman will experience a change of heart given how far Saruman has fallen, Frodo can still hope that Saruman will find it in himself to be a good person once again.

Sam's talent and effort as a gardener are central to the rejuvenation of the Shire's natural beauty, and the dust only reinforces that talent and effort. This suggests that vitality and beauty come from exchanges between cultures—in this case, the hobbits' affinity with things that grow is supported by the Elves' ethereal magic. This kind of cross-cultural unity is reflected in the four hobbits, too, each having gained wisdom and gifts in their travels, but still living very much as hobbits in the home they know and love.



“But I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them.”

Book 6, Chapter 9 Quotes

“Use all the wits and knowledge you have of your own, Sam,” said Frodo, “and then use the gift to help your work and better it. And use it sparingly. There is not much here, and I expect every grain has a value.”

So Sam planted saplings in all the places where specially beautiful or beloved trees had been destroyed, and he put a grain of the precious dust in the soil at the root of each.

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

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 330

Explanation and Analysis

Sam despairs at the death of the Shire's trees, having been a gardener in this country before the quest. He remembers that Galadriel gave him a small box of dust and realizes that he can use it to fertilize new trees where the old ones stood. It's Frodo's wisdom that leads to his decision to travel the Shire, planting saplings and placing a grain of dust at the root of each one. Planting the trees and restoring the Shire's beauty shows that it is possible to recover after war's devastation, but it takes time, patience, and someone like Sam, who's willing to do the hard work of planting trees. It's not Galadriel's gift alone that grows the new trees.

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

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 338

Explanation and Analysis

After two years living in Bag End again and attempting to return to his old life, Frodo has realized he has no way to reclaim the joy and comfort he once felt. His wound from the Nazgûl blade and the burden of the Ring have broken him so badly that he cannot live as a hobbit in the Shire anymore. He can only find rest and peace by travelling to the Undying Lands.

This passage highlights Frodo's acceptance of his own sacrifice. He didn't know when he set out to take the Ring to Rivendell that he'd never really be able to return home—yet he can see the value of what he's saved, even though he himself can't enjoy it. His generosity, wisdom, and love for others allow him to leave the Shire without resenting others for their joyful lives there. He knows that his sacrifice was echoed by countless others in the war who died for their countries and friends, and even by those who gave up their lives to give Frodo a chance at survival.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

BOOK 5, CHAPTER 1

Pippin wakes up to find himself wrapped in Gandalf's cloak on the back of Shadowfax, a swift white horse. He asks Gandalf where they are, and Gandalf replies that they have reached the realm of Gondor. Pippin sees fires in the distance—the beacons that signal Gondor's call for help. Gandalf tells Pippin to go back to sleep, and Pippin does, while thinking about the whereabouts of his friend, Frodo, who might have reached Mount Doom—or might be dead. (In fact, Frodo is alive, looking at the same moon that hangs over Pippin and Gandalf.)

When Pippin wakes up again, he hears Gandalf talking to a group of men standing guard in front of a vast wall. Gandalf describes Pippin as a “valiant man,” at which Pippin exclaims that he is neither a Man, nor valiant. The guards let Gandalf, Pippin, and Shadowfax through the gate. As they pass through, Gandalf warns the men that they are too late to repair the city wall and should prepare to fight. He tells them that the Riders of Rohan might come to their aid, but they cannot rely on them to win the battle.

Gandalf, Pippin, and Shadowfax enter Gondor, and after a few more hours of riding, they come to Minas Tirith, a city of seven levels of stone built around the foot of Mount Mindolluin. When they arrive at the City Gate, the men greet them with the comment that, now that Gandalf has arrived, they know for sure that danger is near. Gandalf and Pippin ride Shadowfax through each gate of the seven levels of the city, climbing towards the Citadel. Pippin notices that, though the city is magnificent, many of its houses are empty of residents.

Gandalf, Pippin, and Shadowfax reach the final level of the city, which houses the Citadel. Shadowfax is led away, and Pippin and Gandalf are admitted to the Citadel by guards bearing the symbol of the **White Tree**. As Pippin and Gandalf stride across the court, Pippin sees a dying tree in the central fountain, which he realizes is the same symbolic White Tree. Gandalf warns Pippin not to say too much to Denethor, who they are here to meet, and especially not to discuss Frodo's journey or mention Aragorn at all. When Pippin is confused by this last request, Gandalf tells him that when Aragorn comes to Gondor, it will be to claim the kingship.

As prefaced in [The Two Towers](#), the previous instalment of The Lord of the Rings series, Gandalf has taken Pippin with him because of Pippin's accidental use of the Seeing Stone; this alerted Sauron to his presence at Isengard. No matter how far Pippin gets from his friends, he thinks of them constantly, showing that however foolhardy he is, he's above all a caring and loyal companion.



Pippin's humility shines through when he refuses to be described as “valiant”—though his pride springs back up when he defends his identity as a hobbit, not a Man. Gandalf's advice to the men at the gate suggests that he is more knowledgeable than they are about the war that approaches, and the men don't yet realize the scale of the danger.



Minas Tirith is a towering city, and its structure suggests that it was built long ago by master craftsmen. Gandalf's foresight and vast knowledge have led to his reputation as a bearer of bad news rather than a helpful advisor. Meanwhile, the empty city suggests that there once was a time of great peace and stability in Gondor, during which families prospered—but this time is long in the past.



Because the White Tree is emblazoned on the livery of the guards, it's clearly an important symbol of Gondor's strength. But, as Pippin sees, the actual White Tree is shriveled and dying, implying that Gondor's strength is also waning. Gandalf's warning reminds the reader that Pippin has a habit of generous conversation, which could get him into trouble—but his innocence is emphasized by the fact that he is only just learning of Aragorn's significance as heir to the throne of Gondor.



Pippin and Gandalf enter the Great Hall. The throne is empty, and Denethor, Lord and Steward of Gondor, sits in a plain chair in front of it. Gandalf tells Denethor he's come to share news and advice. Denethor greets the two coldly, and he asks whether Pippin is one of the hobbits that saw Boromir die. He adds that he regrets sending Boromir on that journey, and should have sent Faramir, his other son, instead. Gandalf tells Denethor that Boromir would not have been stopped from taking on the task.

Denethor has been holding Boromir's horn in his lap. He says he heard the horn being blown far away 13 days ago, and that it washed up by the river, broken in two. At Denethor's request, Pippin describes Boromir's death and his effort to save Pippin and Merry, another of the hobbits of the Fellowship. Pippin's gratitude to Boromir moves him to lay his sword at Denethor's feet in a pledge of loyalty. Denethor accepts Pippin's service.

Denethor's first command to Pippin is for him to tell Denethor everything he knows about Boromir. Gandalf mentions that he has a lot to discuss with Denethor; Denethor replies that he has foreseen more than what Gandalf thinks he knows—foresight is a gift held by the lords of Gondor. Pippin senses tension between the two of them, and though Denethor seems more noble, Pippin feels that Gandalf has more power and wisdom.

After an hour of Denethor's questions about Boromir, Pippin is exhausted and hungry, and Gandalf is impatient. Denethor sends Gandalf to the lodgings prepared for him and allows Pippin to go too. He tells Gandalf to return to the citadel at his leisure, and insists that he will take his advice, but that his only priority is the strength of Gondor. He is Gondor's steward and will hold power unless the king returns. Gandalf replies that he is also a steward, not of any nation, but of anything that is in danger at this time of war. He leaves the hall with Pippin.

When Pippin and Gandalf reach the room that has been prepared for them, Pippin asks Gandalf if he's angry with him. To Pippin's surprise, Gandalf laughs merrily and tells him he did well—though Denethor learned more from Pippin's story than Gandalf wanted him to know (particularly the clues about Aragorn), there was nothing Pippin could have done to keep those things secret. He says that Pippin's oath of service to Denethor was actually handy, because it will allow Pippin to roam Gondor freely, though he should remember that he's bound to do as Denethor commands.

Denethor's position in the plain, lower chair emphasizes his role as a caretaker—not a ruler—of Gondor, powerful only in the absence of a king. Denethor's conversation with Gandalf shows that he is preoccupied with the death of Boromir and is unable to appreciate his son's true, greedy, fallible nature—this has led to him cruelly comparing his dead son and his living one.



Denethor is grieving deeply for Boromir, and he can't understand how his son was able to be killed by orcs—he needs Pippin's eyewitness account in order to make sense of the incident. Pippin's decision to offer his sword to Denethor is driven by the love and appreciation he has for Boromir, demonstrating that he makes decisions from the heart rather than out of cynical strategy.



Though Gondor is on the brink of war, Denethor's priority is to make sense of his son's death, implying that his decisions will be driven by grief and vengeance rather than pragmatism. His defensiveness against Gandalf's advice suggests he will be stubborn and difficult to counsel in the days to come.



Gandalf is impatient because he thinks that Denethor should be spending his time on battle strategy rather than interrogating an innocent hobbit. He is annoyed by Denethor's short-sightedness in focusing only on Gondor's safety, because he knows that there are other beings and goals outside of Gondor that need help and protection.



Gandalf's laughter reminds both Pippin and the reader that, despite the dread of war, there is still humor and joy to be found in people's quirky behavior. Denethor is observant and clever, but Pippin, though less cunning, has displayed his own kind of cleverness, because now he can have a kind of freedom in Minas Tirith outside of Gandalf's supervision.



Gandalf remarks that each following day will bring more bad news. He wishes he knew where Faramir is—but for now he has to go to Denethor’s council meeting. He leaves the lodging, urging Pippin to sharpen his blade and requesting that he visit Shadowfax to ensure his comfort. Pippin goes outside to look around the street. A man called Beregond walks up and greets him; he’s been sent to tell Pippin the pass-words of the city and answer his questions. Pippin’s first question is about food: when are meals, and where are they served? When Beregond learns that Pippin has, in fact, already eaten this morning, he laughs and tells him that there isn’t much food to be had. But he can tell Pippin is dismayed to hear this, so, after visiting Shadowfax, the two of them go to eat at one of the dining halls of the Guard.

Beregond and Pippin eat and talk, sharing stories of Gondor and the Shire. Beregond is surprised to hear about Pippin’s many dangerous adventures, because Pippin looks like a child to him. Pippin looks out over the wall and watches the comings and goings from Minas Tirith. A few horsemen arrive, but most of the traffic is in the form of wagons taking the elderly, the children, and the women to refuge. Beregond is sad to see them leave, as many will never again see their family members. He tells Pippin there are very few children left in the city—the only ones who remain are some of the boys, among whom is his own son.

Pippin asks Beregond what it is he can see down at the curve of the river. Beregond tells him it’s the ruin of Osgiliath, which was held by Gondor as an outpost until the Black Riders destroyed it a year ago. At the mention of the Black Riders, Pippin looks towards Mordor, where all he can see is a huge **shadow** which seems to be growing. He asks Beregond when the war will begin, because preparation seems to have slowed. Beregond replies that things feel slow because war is on the verge of beginning—it’s “the deep breath before the plunge.”

The war is clearly a large and complicated one, involving many parties, but though Gondor is only one part of many, Beregond feels that they must succeed in battle if there is to be any hope at all. Beregond asks Pippin if he has any hope that Gondor will survive the war. Pippin thinks of all the terror he’s seen on his journey and begins to despair. At that moment, something seems to obscure the sun, and Pippin hears a distant, piercing cry from high above that deeply disturbs him. Beregond shares Pippin’s feeling of horror.

Faramir’s absence is a concern for Gandalf, who knows that Faramir is more useful and important than Denethor gives him credit for. This passage also suggests that even in the midst of serious matters of war, Gandalf ensures he takes care of the less powerful beings around him, whether they be hobbits like Pippin or animals like Shadowfax. Pippin’s unfamiliarity with the austerity of war reminds the reader that he is a hobbit, far from home, accustomed to the comfort and excess of peacetime—to him, a lack of food is unacceptable.



Though Pippin’s size suggests his youth, he has in fact endured more than some Guards of the City. Nevertheless, Beregond compares Pippin’s size with his 10-year-old son’s, which suggests he feels slightly protective over him. From watching the wagons leaving the city and listening to Beregond, Pippin is becoming aware of the danger that awaits everyone who stays in Minas Tirith. The departure of the women, children, and elderly suggests that even the residential areas of the city are under threat.



Pippin has never been in a war before, let alone one of this size. Beregond, who has some experience of battle, knows the feeling of slow anticipation that precedes the onslaught, noting that it feels like the last gasp of air before being submerged. The shadow obscuring Mordor reflects, in this moment, Pippin’s own uncertainty about what the next days will bring—he can’t see the details of the danger that’s coming towards him.



Though Beregond’s sure of Gondor’s importance in the war, he still asks Pippin—a relative stranger who’s new to the city and unused to war—to reassure him about their hope of victory, betraying his underlying fear. Pippin, though usually optimistic, finds himself unable to reassure Beregond; his despair is reflected by the arrival of a Black Rider (the piercing cry from high above). The terror the Rider brings suggests that there’s more horror to come.



Pippin and Beregond sit together in fear, but after a while, Pippin looks up to see the sun shining. He resolves to hope instead of despair and tells Beregond that Gondor will stand, “if only on one leg.” Beregond agrees with Pippin: Gondor will survive even if Minas Tirith falls, because the people know ways to escape into the mountains. Still, Pippin wishes the war were over: he’s not ready to fight, but the waiting is becoming unbearable. Beregond suggests that, because Gondor’s army is so weak, waiting for the enemy to strike first is the only thing they can do.

A bell rings to signal meal time, so Beregond takes Pippin to eat with the men of his company. The men are excited to meet Pippin: they’ve heard rumors of him being a Prince of the Halflings. Pippin reluctantly quashes this rumor. Nevertheless, the men of the company hold him in high regard and listen eagerly to his stories. Eventually, it’s time for the men to return to their duties. As Beregond leaves, he tells Pippin to go and find his son who’ll show him around the city. Pippin descends the levels of the city and, as he walks, the people around him stare and salute.

When Pippin reaches the lowest level, a group of children runs towards him. One of the boys is Bergil, Beregond’s son. Pippin tells him Beregond sent him, and he asks Bergil to show him the city. Bergil agrees, and the group heads to the city gate. Pippin impresses Bergil by giving the pass-word to exit the gate, where a crowd watches a line of sturdy soldiers arrive, led by Forlong, the Lord of Lossarnach. The crowd is disappointed to see a much smaller group of soldiers than they were expecting.

Several more companies of soldiers arrive at the gate, including that of Imrahil, Prince of Dol Amroth, a relative of Denethor. Once all the arriving parties have entered the city, night begins to fall, and Bergil and Pippin hurry inside too. Pippin heads back to his lodgings to find Gandalf—but Gandalf isn’t there. Pippin falls asleep and wakes up when Gandalf returns in the middle of the night. Gandalf paces and sighs, wishing Faramir would return to Minas Tirith. He urges Pippin to go back to bed, and says that the night will be short, and tomorrow, the sun won’t rise.

After the Black Rider leaves, Pippin is able to regain his buoyant optimism quickly by looking around him. The world goes on, and the sun still shines—all is not lost. His turn of phrase suggests he hasn’t lost his humor, and he’s able to cheer Beregond up a little, too. Meanwhile, waiting for the battle to start seems to be a test of strength in itself for Pippin, whose uncertainties about what’s to come add to his fear.



Pippin’s reputation precedes him, and he’s unused to the kind of honor the men grant him. His status as an outsider proves a useful social tool: the men’s curiosity about his life and adventures far from Gondor allows him to befriend them easily. Pippin has experienced a dramatic change in status, from being a nuisance escorted by Gandalf to an honored soldier in an ancient kingdom of men.



Pippin’s stature allows him to gain the trust of the young boys and begin a friendship with Bergil, proving once again that his difference in size is an advantage more than an inconvenience. The disappointingly meagre size of the companies that arrive at Minas Tirith highlight Gondor’s decline as a great city and the danger that they’ll lose the war if not aided by another significant force.



Gandalf represents safety for Pippin, which means that Pippin seeks reassurance from him on the eve of battle. It’s clear that Gandalf has been busy strategizing, though Minas Tirith’s preparations aren’t to his satisfaction, and he’s deeply concerned about the oncoming danger. Faramir seems to be vital to Gandalf’s hopes and plans, and so his absence is deeply worrying.



BOOK 5, CHAPTER 2

Merry, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli prepare to leave the wreckage of Isengard alongside Théoden, King of Rohan, and his party. Aragorn is still working out his plan of travel to Minas Tirith, and Legolas and Gimli are eager to go along with him. Merry demands not to be left behind, but Aragorn suggests that Merry will travel with Théoden—though he warns him that the journey might not end happily. As the group rides towards Edoras, one of the Riders of Rohan brings news from the back of the pack that another group of horsemen are gaining on them. Théoden brings the Riders to a halt.

The other party of riders draws up: there seem to be as many of them as there are Riders of Rohan, if not more. Éomer calls the unknown riders to a halt, at which one of them dismounts. When Théoden asks for the riders' purpose, the leader introduces himself as Halbarad Dúnadan, Ranger of the North, and reveals that they've been looking for Aragorn. To Merry's relief, Aragorn greets Halbarad like an old friend and introduces the Dúnedain riders as his own kin. The two groups of horsemen agree to ride together.

Elrohir, who is riding with the Dúnedain, brings a message from his father, Elrond, to Aragorn: he should "remember the Paths of the Dead." Aragorn says he'll only go that way if absolutely necessary. He sees that Halbarad is carrying a long staff wrapped in cloth and asks what it is, to which Halbarad replies that it's a gift from Galadriel. Aragorn guesses what it is and asks Halbarad to continue carrying it for him.

At the end of the night, the riders arrive at Helm's Deep, where they plan to rest and discuss their next movements. In the morning, Legolas and Gimli wake Merry to show him around the fortress. Gimli is eager to visit the caves, but there isn't time—Legolas promises they'll return together if peace is restored. Merry yawns: he misses Pippin, he hasn't had enough sleep, and he feels like a burden to those around him. He asks after Aragorn, and Legolas tells him he's in a high chamber where he's been thinking for hours.

Gimli, Legolas, and Merry walk together and observe the wreckage that was left from the battle at Helm's Deep. They go to the hall for the midday meal, where a seat is set for Merry at Théoden's side. Théoden tells Merry he will have a pony made ready for him. Éomer says there isn't much armor around for a person of Merry's size, but Merry reveals his own sword and, moved by his love for Théoden, lays the sword on his lap to offer his service. Théoden accepts Merry's offer.

Aragorn has become a beloved friend and leader to Gimli, Legolas, and Merry, who each ask to go along with Aragorn, even though he doesn't have a clear plan mapped out. News of other riders following the path of Théoden's company is cause for immediate caution, because even in their own lands, Rohan is under the same threat that Gondor is. The enemy is spreading.



The party of unknown riders is unidentifiable by the Rohirrim until their leader reveals their identity, which suggests they prefer anonymity and stealth to pride and fanfare. This is a rare occasion in which Aragorn is among his own people, and their goal of locating him is a sign that he's coming into his own power and accumulating allies.



It's clear from Aragorn's response to Elrohir that the Paths of the Dead are a dangerous and uncertain route. He senses that Halbarad's carrying something significant, and his ability to guess what it is suggests that it's an item he's been anticipating using for a long time.



The stringent urgency of wartime is unfamiliar to Merry, and he finds the constant movement and lack of comfort and friendship difficult to tolerate. Legolas's description of Aragorn suggests that Aragorn is being tormented by indecision, and the process of deciding what path he should take is a complicated and taxing one.



Though Merry feels alone and out of his depth, his seat beside King Théoden at the meal table and Théoden's request for Merry to be given armor and an appropriately sized steed proves that Merry is valued and respected. His traits of generosity, care, and sacrifice surface in his offer of service to Théoden, something he does even without understanding the danger ahead.



After the midday meal, the Riders and the Dúnedain assemble, mounted. Éomer and Aragorn emerge from the fortress to join the company. Aragorn seems to have aged years overnight. He tells Théoden that his plans have changed. Instead of journeying slowly and secretly to Dunharrow with the Riders of Rohan, he will ride there swiftly with the Dúnedain on their way to the Paths of the Dead. When Théoden hears Aragorn's plan, he's frightened and confused—all he knows of the Paths of the Dead is that no living man has ever survived them. Éomer is certain he'll never see Aragorn alive again.

The Riders of Rohan depart. Aragorn returns to the hall to eat before his journey, where Legolas asks him why he changed his plans. Aragorn says that he looked into the **Seeing Stone** to communicate with Sauron. As heir to the throne of Gondor, he is the master of the Stones; still, he found the encounter exhausting. Through the Stone, Sauron learned of the living heir to Gondor's throne. Aragorn's hope is that this news will prompt Sauron to make a reckless first move in the war. The Stone also showed Aragorn that huge enemy forces are moving from the south, and the only way to ensure they don't defeat Gondor is for Aragorn to take the quickest path: the Paths of the Dead.

Gimli asks if there's any hope of surviving the Paths of the Dead. Aragorn reminds him that he's Isildur's heir and can go that way at a time of dire need. He tells Gimli and Legolas he'd be grateful if they came with him, but they are free to decide their own paths. He explains that the Dead are an ancient people who, instead of honoring their oath to Isildur, abandoned him in the first battle against Sauron and were cursed never to rest until their oath was fulfilled. Legolas and Gimli resolve to go with Aragorn. They mount their horses, Halbarad blows a loud horn, and the company thunders away.

The Dúnedain riders arrive at Dunharrow the next night. Éowyn greets them. They recount the battle at Helm's Deep to her over supper. When Éowyn learns that they plan to ride the Paths of the Dead, she blanches, sure that their journey will end in death. After dinner, Éowyn finds Aragorn to speak with him alone. She tells him that if he is sure he needs to go on this path, he should take her with them. Aragorn tells Éowyn her duty is with her people, but this frustrates her: she feels that she is always chosen to stay behind while others ride out to perform more noble deeds. She's capable of riding and fighting, but because she's a woman, she's always left to tend to the domestic affairs. Aragorn still refuses to let her join them on their journey.

Aragorn's solitary night ruminating on his plans seems to have led him to the realization that he must act urgently and take the drastic risk of the Paths of the Dead. The reputation of the Paths is so fearsome that Théoden and Éomer immediately doubt that Aragorn will survive—the plan seems more like a death wish than a battle strategy.



Aragorn's decision to use the Seeing Stone to his advantage shows that he's confident in his own strength; he's beginning to claim the rights afforded to him as heir to the throne of Gondor. He knows that Sauron's arrogance might lead him to make the first move in battle. Learning of the enemy troops to the south drives Aragorn not to despair but to take a huge risk for the chance to protect Gondor, highlighting both his bravery and his allegiance to the kingdom.



Aragorn refuses to force his friends to follow him, demonstrating the love and respect he feels for them. Their decision to go with him anyway once again proves their loyalty, though they're unsure of their chances of survival. Aragorn's plan shows that he's fully accepted his position as Isildur's heir and is eager both to settle the disputes of the past and to provide Gondor with every possible chance of victory against Sauron.



Éowyn was absent from the battle at Helm's Deep, entrusted instead with the protection of Rohan's women and children, so the only knowledge she has of the fighting must come to her second-hand. But she's confident in her ability as a rider and soldier and has no qualms about following Aragorn through the Paths of the Dead, even though she knows they're likely to be fatal. Aragorn refuses to let her come out of love for her, but it seems he doesn't fully understand her desperation to be useful in battle rather than in a domestic setting. Éowyn's response implies that she feels belittled by the domestic tasks she's been assigned all her life.



At daybreak, the company sets out to ride. Éowyn comes to bid them farewell, and Gimli and Legolas are surprised to see her weeping. Again, she begs Aragorn to let her ride with them, and again, Aragorn refuses. She stumbles back to her tent, distressed. The company rides to the foot of the mountain where they find a door carved with signs and figures. The riders and the horses are deeply unsettled, but Aragorn urges them on, and the others' love and respect for him encourages them to follow him. Gimli's knees shake; he's embarrassed to be a Dwarf, so used to the underground, and yet so terrified to go on.

The company moves ahead with lit torches. Voices seem to whisper around them in a language they don't recognize. They reach a huge cavern, where Aragorn finds a man's bones and armor. He doesn't know who the man is or why he used this path, but he turns his attention now to the Dead and calls them to meet him at the Stone of Erech. There's no answer to his call except for a profound silence followed by a chill wind. The torches are blown out and can't be lit again. Eventually, the company passes out of the cave. They mount their horses again, and Legolas can see the Dead following behind them, ghostlike.

The sun has set. Aragorn urges the company to ride with speed. Just before midnight, they reach the Stone of Erech. When they stop, Aragorn blows a silver horn, and the company hears a round of answering horns like an echo and feels the host of the Dead around them. Aragorn commands the Dead to aid him and has Halbarad unfurl the standard he's been carrying. The company camps until morning, then rides out again, exhausted, with the Dead following.

BOOK 5, CHAPTER 3

The Riders of Rohan arrive at Harrowdale. Merry is tired from the long journey, and lonely—he thinks of all his friends who are now far from him. Théoden tells Éomer he will continue on to Edoras tomorrow, and Éomer suggests that, after the muster there, Théoden return to Dunharrow to wait out the war—but Théoden resolves not to hide from battle. The Riders press on to Dunharrow and are greeted by voices and trumpets: it seems that the other soldiers of Rohan have already assembled here without waiting for the muster at Edoras. One of the chiefs explains to Théoden that Gandalf had urged the Riders to gather quickly. Théoden asks the marshals and captains to meet him in his quarters as soon as they can.

Gimli and Legolas's surprise at Éowyn's display of emotion implies that she has a tendency to be unwaveringly tough and keep her feelings private. Meanwhile, the dread that emanates from the Paths of the Dead is tangible and potent even from outside the mountain and frightens even Gimli, who spends his life in caves. This suggests that an ancient danger—more threatening than just the darkness of the cave—lies ahead.



The remains of the unknown man are a sign that others' attempts to follow the Paths of the Dead have ended tragically—Éomer and Théoden's worries weren't unfounded. The men's dread increases with the lack of response from the beings in the mountain, and their blown-out torches underscore the fact that anticipation and uncertainty are more frightening than an identifiable danger. Legolas's awareness of the Dead reminds the reader that, as an Elf, he's blessed with heightened senses.



Even though the company has just endured a unique terror, Aragorn urges them on, which suggests that their speed is of vital importance. Because Aragorn asks Halbarad to reveal the standard, it's clear he's decided to fulfil his role as Gondor's leader and demand the loyalty and respect that come with this status.



No matter how far he is from home, Merry's thoughts are with his friends and his priority is to care for and protect them. Éomer thinks that the king should be kept away from the battle to ensure his safety, and Théoden's rejection of this suggestion shows that he's not a cowardly or even a cautious leader, but one who's ready to meet the enemy head-on. It's clear that Gondor's in a dire situation due to Gandalf's request for the Rohirrim to muster early—urgency is paramount.



The king's company follows the path in a zigzag up a cliff face, where at points there are statues of squat men. After climbing a few hundred feet, the company reaches a field near the foot of the Dwimorberg—the same mountain Aragorn's party rode into. Éowyn greets the king and his guard. Merry suspects she has been weeping, though she tells Théoden all is well. She confirms that Aragorn and his riders followed the Paths of the Dead yesterday morning, and Éomer resigns himself never to see them again. Merry ruminates on the Paths of the Dead, and he feels confused and abandoned by all his friends. A trumpet sounds, and he's summoned to the king's side.

Théoden invites Merry to sit beside him. They eat silently together until Merry asks about the Paths of the Dead. All Théoden can tell him is that the last man to venture down that road never returned. Merry doesn't understand why Aragorn would take the Paths; the others are just as confused, though Théoden suggests that perhaps the time has come for the Dead to allow the living to pass through, as was rumored long ago. Éomer still despairs at Aragorn's decision, believing he's been distracted from the war at hand by yet more evil.

An errand-rider of Gondor arrives to speak with Théoden. The rider, Hirgon, is carrying a red arrow: a token of war. Denethor sent him to ask for Rohan's aid. Théoden is cowed by the arrow and asks what Denethor thinks Rohan can offer. Hirgon shares Denethor's suggestion that the Riders of Rohan would at least be better off within Minas Tirith than outside it when it is besieged. Gondor is desperate for help, and Théoden agrees Rohan will assist them, though they still need to fortify their own lands. They will arrive with 6,000 men in a week's time. Hirgon says this may be too long, but any help is better than none.

Théoden suggests that his company rest, and he tells Merry to be ready at sunrise. Merry vows to ride with him, and goes to sleep chanting, "I won't be left, I won't!" When he's awoken, a cloud has covered the land. Though it's morning, the sky is dark. He enters Théoden's quarters to hear Hirgon saying that the cloud has come from Mordor and is a sign that war has begun. Théoden decides that they should ride to Gondor quickly on the open road, because the **shadow** provides cover. The horns blow to marshal the riders: they sound harsh and ominous to Merry though they once sounded "clear and brave."

Éowyn's decision not to tell Théoden of her true feelings, pretending instead to be satisfied with her role as protector of the women and children, suggests she might be hiding her plans or intentions from him. Merry is easily affected by Éomer's despair, and he doesn't understand enough about the war to know why Aragorn would choose to take such a treacherous path—yet his ignorance doesn't keep him from being a valued part of the king's company.



Théoden doesn't fully understand the terror of the Paths of the Dead, which leaves room for the idea that Aragorn might have made a wise decision in going there, or at least that there might be a sliver of hope for his return. Éomer can't understand how Aragorn's choice of such a dangerous path could end up benefitting Gondor or Rohan—he's focused on the tangible strength of their numbers and is unaware that there could be other methods of gaining strength.



Théoden's honor and willingness to sacrifice himself and his people shows in his decision to offer Gondor assistance, even when Rohan is under great threat themselves. The conversation reveals that both Gondor and Rohan are working against overwhelming odds, acting more out of honor and principle than any logical or tangible hope.



Merry's confusion at being awoken in the darkness, despite the fact that it's technically morning, shows that he's entering a state of war he's unused to, where unnatural demands on his spirit will be made. His changing perception of the marshalling horns shows that he's discovering the dread of war and it's beginning to influence his buoyant attitude.



Théoden releases Merry from his service and instructs him to stay behind with Éowyn. Merry is dismayed. All his friends have gone to war; he shouldn't stay behind. Théoden allows him to come as far as Edoras. Then Éowyn takes Merry to show him the armor she's found for him and says that Aragorn asked her to make sure Merry was prepared for battle. After providing him with a helmet and shield, she bids him farewell.

Théoden was happy to have Merry in his company as long as he required jolly companionship, but his dismissal of Merry at this point shows he doubts the hobbit's skill in battle and can't foresee Merry being of more use than he would be a hassle. However, it seems that Aragorn knew Merry would be involved in combat somehow, proven by his request of Éowyn to outfit Merry in armor.



The Riders of Rohan assemble, joined by a large host of men on spare horses. Merry rides behind Théoden past the ranks of men. One Rider, smaller than most others, catches Merry's attention—his hopeless expression is chilling. They reach Edoras by noon. Merry begs again not to leave Théoden, but Théoden tells him he would only be a burden to the Riders. One Rider—the one from before, with the hopeless expression—approaches Merry and tells him he'll take him on his horse and hide him under his cloak. He asks Merry to call him Dernhelm.

The fact that Merry's eyes are drawn to the soldier with the steeliest, most hopeless expression shows that the reality of war is still shocking and new to him—he's unused to seeing someone so resolved to go to their death. Soon, though, Merry's fate is bound to this hopeless soldier's: the danger of the oncoming battle is now inevitable.



As the Riders make the journey from Edoras, they are greeted intermittently with news that Rohan's borders are being assailed by the enemy. Éomer urges the Riders on: it's too late to divert from their path. They journey past the beacon hills, but by now the beacons have been extinguished. The **shadow** above them grows and deepens.

Théoden's decision to bring his soldiers to Gondor's aid is quickly proving to be a decision of great sacrifice—he's required to actively ignore the threats on his own land in order to be of use to a fellow kingdom.



BOOK 5, CHAPTER 4

Gandalf wakes Pippin and tells him to prepare to see Denethor. There's a small meal laid out for Pippin; he's dispirited to learn he won't eat again until noon. Denethor greets Pippin and Gandalf. He asks Pippin if he can sing—perhaps he can be of service through entertainment. This worries Pippin, who doesn't think his Shire songs are appropriate for Denethor's hall. Denethor changes the subject, asking Gandalf about the movements of the Rohirrim. He tells Pippin to go to be fitted for armor, and then to return to his side. At the armories, Pippin finds himself dressed uncomfortably in the black and silver livery of the City Guard emblazoned with the **White Tree**.

Though Pippin has already learnt a great deal about the scale of the danger that awaits, and the high stakes of the oncoming battle, his dismay at his small breakfast prove that he'll never really grow out of his hobbitlike priorities of food and comfort. In fact, his hobbit qualities make him feel uncomfortable and out of place, unused to Gondor's armor and uncertain of the value of his songs in Denethor's court. Though he is doing all he can to prove his usefulness, he's aware he'll be seen as different nevertheless.



The **shadow** deepens over Minas Tirith over the course of the day. After many hours, Pippin is released from duty and goes to find food in the mess, where he meets Beregond again. The two sit outside together. Pippin feels that it's been years since they talked yesterday; he's weighed down by his armor and the reality of war is sinking in. He asks Beregond if Minas Tirith is usually covered by shadow when the wind blows from the east, and Beregond tells him that this weather isn't natural but a mechanism of Sauron's malice, sent from Mount Doom.

Though it's only been a day since Pippin arrived at Minas Tirith, the weight of his armor, the knowledge he's gained about the war, and the sad lack of food he's been provided with have the combined effect of weariness on him. But his assumption that the thick, oppressive shadow is a natural phenomenon means he's still learning of the scale of the war and the degree of the enemy's evil.



Beregond wishes Faramir would return—he would not be as cowed by the **shadow** as the rest of the men are. Suddenly, Beregond and Pippin hear a terrifying cry. Pippin recognizes the sound from back in the Shire, but it has become more hateful. Beregond points below at five Black Riders flying on huge birdlike creatures. The Riders are circling and swooping on a small group of horsemen. Beregond hears Faramir's trumpet call and cries for someone to help the horsemen. Pippin peers over the wall to see Gandalf riding towards the men. Gandalf raises his hand at the Black Riders and sends out a shaft of white light, at which the Riders recoil and fly away.

Pippin watches Gandalf and the riders gather themselves and move towards the city gate. He hurries to the Citadel to greet them, and as they ride up through the city, he hears many voices crying out the names of Faramir and Gandalf. When the two of them reach the Citadel, Pippin sees how closely Faramir resembles Boromir, but he feels moved with devotion to Faramir in a way he hasn't felt before. He sees that Faramir is a captain that many would follow regardless of the danger. Faramir is amazed to see a hobbit in the livery of Minas Tirith. Gandalf explains that Pippin is his charge, but there isn't time to explain more: they are to meet with Denethor.

In Denethor's chamber, Faramir eats a little before relaying his travels of the past 10 days. He recounts the different struggles he encountered with his men at the border of Gondor, and notes, to Pippin and Gandalf's great interest, that he encountered other hobbits in that time. Gandalf's hands tremble while Faramir tells them of his meeting with Frodo and of Frodo and Sam's plan to go to Cirith Ungol. Gandalf urges Faramir to tell him the exact time that the hobbits parted from Faramir. Faramir tells him that they would not have reached Cirith Ungol before today, so the **shadow**, having started to grow yesterday, is not a sign of their failure.

Faramir describes his journey back to Minas Tirith. He asks Denethor whether he carried his errands out well. Angrily, Denethor replies that Faramir doesn't care what Denethor thinks and would rather have the approval of Gandalf than of his father. Denethor grieves Boromir's absence. Faramir, he thinks, is too gentle to be useful in war. Faramir asks Denethor if he'd rather that he'd died in Boromir's place. Denethor tells him he would have preferred that, because Boromir was loyal to him, and he regrets that the **Ring** didn't end up in Minas Tirith so that he could have kept it himself.

The sound of the Nazgûl has increased in terror and potency, which signals the fact that the enemy has only grown over the last months, not just in number but in each troops' individual strength. Gandalf's ability to pierce the shadow by using, it seems, his own body shows that he's a well-matched opponent for the Black Riders, demonstrating the power of light amidst their darkness and beginning the pattern in which each victory on the battlefield clears Mordor's shadow, at least for a short time.



Now that they've witnessed Gandalf's power, the people of the city praise and respect him instead of treating him as a bad omen. The people's chants betray their desire for strong leadership, and their lack of it under Denethor's rule. Pippin feels similarly, and the obvious difference between Faramir and Boromir—which Denethor sees negatively—appears to Pippin as a sign of hope. This suggests that Faramir might succeed in refusing the temptation of glory and honor where Boromir was unable.



This moment reveals Gandalf's level of uncertainty and worry about Frodo and Sam's success and safety. Though he's been stern and buoyant around Pippin until now, it's clear to see he's truly unsure whether Frodo and Sam will succeed, or even if they're still alive. Though he's been encouraging all around him to behave with hope and courage, he himself is reduced to searching for signs of hope in small logistical details, which thankfully, Faramir can provide.



Denethor's insecurity is obvious here: in the presence of Gandalf, he's unsure whether his son is truly asking him for advice or just speaking with Gandalf in mind. It becomes clear that one of Denethor's main frustrations with Faramir is that he's not blindly loyal. When Boromir tended to follow his father's instructions without question, Faramir has a tendency to ask others' opinions, and Denethor interprets this as arrogance and untrustworthiness.



Gandalf tells Denethor that Boromir would never have brought the **Ring** to him. Even if Boromir had lived, he would've tried to claim the Ring for himself. Denethor disagrees and doubts Gandalf's wisdom. In his opinion, the wisest course of action would have been to keep the Ring in Minas Tirith and only to use it at a time of utmost need—Gandalf's decision to send it with Frodo to Mount Doom was completely foolish. He is sure he would've endured the test of the Ring and not used it. But Gandalf doubts him and says so: he didn't even trust himself to keep the Ring safe. Pippin senses a tense conflict between Gandalf and Denethor, and he prepares for a violent outburst.

Denethor changes the subject to ask Faramir about Osgiliath's strength. (Osgiliath was the main city of Gondor before the Black Riders took and destroyed it.) Faramir says more soldiers are coming to assist, but they agree that this won't be enough. Faramir goes to rest, and Gandalf and Pippin head to their lodgings. Pippin asks Gandalf if there's any hope for Frodo. Gandalf tells him, "Just a fool's hope." He interprets Faramir's news about Frodo and Sam to mean they may still be alive. But Sauron's first signs of war are arriving sooner than expected. Perhaps Pippin's use of the **Seeing Stone**, which alerted Sauron of Saruman's defeat, hurried the enemy along—or perhaps Aragorn used the Stone to challenge Sauron. Pippin wonders why Frodo and Sam are travelling with Gollum, and why they're taking such a dangerous route. Gandalf can't give him a clear answer but feels that there will be treachery on Gollum's part.

The next morning, Minas Tirith is still covered in shadow and the men hear intermittent cries from the Black Riders. They worry that the Riders of Rohan will never arrive. Faramir counsels Denethor that the enemy will greatly overpower them at Osgiliath. Denethor refuses to yield Osgiliath without a fight and orders Faramir to ride out to command the men there. As he leaves, he asks Denethor to pay him more respect upon his return. Denethor replies that that will depend on Faramir's success in battle. Gandalf urges Faramir to remember his value: Denethor will remember his love for him before the end.

No more news arrives at Minas Tirith until nightfall, when an errand-rider returns to tell Denethor that a host is approaching Osgiliath from Mordor. The men doubt that Osgiliath will hold against the enemy, even with Faramir at its command. The next day, they learn that the enemy has won Osgiliath—they've been laying secret plans to cross the river for a long time and "swarmed across like beetles." Gandalf rides out to help Faramir and his men return to the city. Pippin spends the night looking in the direction of Osgiliath, and when the morning bells sound, he sees fires appearing far away. Men in the city cry that the enemy has taken the outer wall.

Denethor's arrogant and foolish self-assurance that he could have stood up against the Ring's temptation mirrors Boromir's, suggesting that he preferred Boromir as a son because he saw even his weakest qualities as admirable strengths. Because he believes he has superior foresight, he's unable to understand how Gandalf has any hope in the hobbits' quest to destroy the Ring. This may foreshadow Denethor's later descent into despair.



Denethor's preoccupation with Osgiliath is a sign that he's clinging to an idea of Gondor from the past. Instead of appreciating and working within the Gondor that has been partially destroyed and lacks its prior strength, Denethor is hopelessly focused on demonstrating symbolic valiance, which is why Osgiliath, which used to be Gondor's main city, is his focus. Meanwhile, this passage shows Gandalf beginning to be more truthful and realistic with Pippin, which suggests both that he trusts Pippin and knows he's learned a lot in his time at Minas Tirith, and that he believes that honest hope is stronger than a false façade of security.



Though Faramir has just returned, the hope he brought the city is fleeting because citizens have begun to worry again. The violent oscillations between hope and despair are, it seems, an unavoidable characteristic of wartime. Gandalf knows that Faramir's strength partially depends on his hope, which is why he assures him of his father's love—an assurance that's much needed, since Denethor is unwilling to show his son affection or respect.



Osgiliath's quick defeat is another sign that Denethor sent Faramir and his men to a hopeless fate because he couldn't relinquish his idea of Gondor's glory. The enemy is less of an army and more of a force of nature, given Tolkien's description of them as a horde of beetles: their industriousness is single-minded and persistent, focused less on the actions and value of individual soldiers than on the mechanical function of the army unit.



Gandalf returns to Minas Tirith, escorting wagons of wounded soldiers. He meets Denethor in a high chamber, bringing news that Faramir has stayed behind with the rearguard but there's little hope the men will hold together long enough to return safely. Gandalf also tells Denethor that the Lord of the Nazgûl—the chief Black Rider—has come to lead the battle for the enemy. Denethor asks whether Gandalf has returned in defeat, unable to face this foe. But Gandalf retorts that he has returned to guard the wounded soldiers and to instruct Denethor to prepare a host of mounted soldiers, because the enemy's main weakness is that they have few horses. Denethor hopes that the Rohirrim will arrive soon.

From the walls of Minas Tirith, the men see more fires lit across the fields. Then Faramir and his men appear, marching towards the city. Suddenly, they're swarmed by orcs and Southron men wielding fire and arrows, and the Black Riders begin to swoop down on them. Faramir's men scatter and fall. At the sound of a trumpet, the knights of Dol Amroth emerge from Minas Tirith to come to Faramir's aid, along with Shadowfax bearing Gandalf, who once more sends a beam of light from his hand. The enemy forces are overpowered long enough for Faramir and his men to retreat—but when they arrive in the city, a third of the men have been lost and Faramir is nowhere to be seen.

Faramir finally appears at the rear of the company, carried by Prince Imrahil: he's been wounded by a deadly dart. The Prince brings Faramir to Denethor. Denethor learns of Faramir's bravery in battle, but he says nothing. He orders a bed be made for his son, then goes up to a secret room in his high tower. From below, people see a flickering white light from the windows. Denethor returns to sit silently at Faramir's side; on his return, his face seems "more deathlike than his son's."

Minas Tirith is completely besieged. There is no hope of the Rohirrim's arrival—the roads in are taken by enemies. Enemy camps spring up below "like a foul fungus-growth." Orcs dig trenches in rings around the city and fill them with fire. The men of the city laugh to see the enemy setting up catapults, because Minas Tirith's walls are too strong to be damaged by those weapons. But the catapults launch missiles that explode into flame. As the men hurry to put out the fires, the catapults begin shooting the decapitated heads of the men lost in the defeat at Osgiliath. Amidst all this, the Black Riders return. The men begin to think "only of hiding and crawling, and of death."

Gandalf has become a symbol of protection for Minas Tirith, appearing whenever soldiers on the battlefield need assistance or protection. Instead of showing gratitude, Denethor continues to deride Gandalf, suggesting he's met his match and has returned in fear—willingly mistaking Gandalf's pragmatism and careful strategy for weakness. It's a sign that Denethor will be easily cowed by any sign of impending defeat in the battle to come. But the Rohirrim still offer tangible hope, and it's this hope that drives Gandalf onwards.



Gandalf once again appears as an aid and protector on the battlefield, but he's less successful this time—men have died and been wounded before he can help them. It's becoming clear that the enemy's strength and numbers are overwhelming, and that they won't be defeated by any regular display of Gondor's strength. This is a significant defeat for Gondor, mostly because Faramir, on who they pinned a great deal of hope, has failed to return along with his soldiers.



Faramir's seemingly fatal wound sends Denethor into deep meditation, showing that Denethor's love for his son and his desire for his bloodline to continue are more profound than he earlier revealed. His transformation after entering the room in the high tower has similarities with Aragorn's transformation after using the Seeing Stone, which is a hint that Denethor may have been doing the same thing. However, his apathy and silence is nothing compared to Aragorn's urgent action, which strikes a clear contrast between each man's qualities as a leader.



The description of the enemy camps as fungus growths suggests that they're quick-spreading and ugly. This is a direct contrast to the tower of Minas Tirith, which is ancient, beautiful, and was built by master craftsmen over many years. Where the enemy takes a quick and crude route to success, Gondor's approach is more traditional, relying on the strength of men and their individual skills. It's unclear at this point which approach will prove stronger, but Mordor's inhumane methods, including firing human heads into the city, proves they can induce despair for Gondor's troops.



Meanwhile, Faramir lies in the Citadel in a fever. Rumor reaches the rest of the city that he's dying. Denethor sits beside Faramir, ignoring the battle. Pippin waits on Denethor, who seems aged and hopeless and expresses remorse at sending his son into danger. He claims that his line is ending. When men arrive to ask for instructions, Denethor sends them away and tells them to follow whoever they want: he will stay with his son. He orders servants to carry Faramir beside him and they walk together to the Silent Street—the road to the city's funeral pyre. Denethor tells Pippin to fetch wood and oil: he plans to burn with Faramir. Pippin leaves as ordered but goes instead to find Gandalf. He thinks that Faramir needs medicine rather than to be burned alive.

As Pippin searches for Gandalf, he runs into Beregond and tells him that Denethor has lost his grip on reality and is dangerous. He urges Beregond to find a way to stop Denethor from doing anything destructive. Beregond must choose between following orders and saving Faramir's life. Pippin runs down to the city's lowest level. Fires are raging, and he hears the cry of a Black Rider. He turns the corner to find Gandalf, but he's terrified by what he sees and stops in his tracks.

While Pippin waited on Denethor, the battle had been building down below. Enemy forces press closer to the wall and, with the help of a huge flame-filled battering ram, burst through the gate. The Lord of the Nazgûl has entered Minas Tirith, and now Gandalf faces him. Where the Black Rider's head should be, there are only flames. They face off, and in their tense silence, a cock crows to signal that the morning has come despite the cover of shadow. With that sound, the horns of Rohan ring out: the Rohirrim have arrived.

While hope is quick to die amongst the soldiers, the rumor of terrible news—namely, Faramir's demise—spreads quickly, showing the unquenchable power of despair and the constant struggle required to replace it with hope. Denethor's sudden display of affection for Faramir and remorse at sending him into danger shows that his leadership has been based on false, arrogant displays of strength which have done nothing to fortify his city or the spirits of his soldiers. Pippin's bravery and wisdom begin to shine in this passage, as he starts relying on his own judgment and ability rather than following others' directions.



While before, Pippin saw himself as less battle-ready and lower in status than Beregond, he now seems to accept his power and use it to his advantage. But his trust for Beregond remains, which means he allows him to come to his own decision rather than forcing or coercing him. Meanwhile, the battle in the lower levels has escalated in Pippin's absence, which means Denethor himself has also been removed from much of the strategy and action for a significant amount of time.



The ability of Mordor's troops to enter Minas Tirith relied on their huge battering ram, which was presumably created for this occasion and suggests that Sauron has strategized for the battle at Minas Tirith for a significant amount of time—this is one of his opportunities to decimate his foe. Even in the midst of huge violence and danger, nature, in the form of a small bird, emerges and brings hope with it, suggesting it'll never be defeated even by unprecedented destruction.



BOOK 5, CHAPTER 5

A day's ride away from Minas Tirith, Merry lies restlessly in a forest where the Rohirrim have camped. He's exhausted, lonely, and has been ignored by the Riders for the whole journey. He wanders towards a lantern, under which Théoden and Éomer are discussing strategy. He sees beside them a squat Wild Man, similar in stature to the carved men on the cliff path at Dunharrow. The man explains that he has brought news to help the Rohirrim: many enemies occupy the roads towards Minas Tirith. The Wild Man gives his name—Ghân-buri-Ghân—and explains that he is the leader of the Wild Men who are adept observers. He offers to show the Riders of Rohan along a different road unknown by the enemy. Théoden and Éomer accept his offer. Merry slips away unseen to prepare for the journey.

The Riders make their way along the hidden path towards Minas Tirith. The Wild Men report to Ghân that the surrounding area is clear of enemies, though there are many at Minas Tirith, and the outer wall has been destroyed. Éomer takes this as good news, because it means the wall cannot be held against them. Théoden thanks Ghân and farewells him. Just before leaving, the Wild Man sniffs the air and tells the Riders that the wind is changing. Soon after, the king's scouts return to report they've found two dead men and two dead horses. One of the men was carrying a red arrow. Théoden realizes that must mean Denethor hasn't received any news of the Rohirrim's approach.

The Rohirrim ride through the night. Merry rides with Dernhelm, and he notices he has left his place in his designated company in order to be nearer the king. Théoden rallies the Riders with a speech and instructs Éomer to lead into battle. They increase their speed. Merry holds tight to Dernhelm and worries about his ability in battle. The Rohirrim pass the destroyed wall stealthily: the enemy troops are focused on their destruction of the city. Suddenly, Merry feels the wind change as Ghân-buri-Ghân predicted. Théoden gives a battle cry, the horns of the Rohirrim sound, and the darkness seems to disappear as the enemy is destroyed underfoot.

BOOK 5, CHAPTER 6

The Lord of the Nazgûl is disturbed by the breaking of the **shadow** and rides out from the city immediately. Théoden leads his Riders towards the city with Dernhelm in the leading group. Though outnumbered, they drive off the Haradrim, but out of nowhere a darkness arrives that spooks the horses. Many Riders are thrown from their saddles, including Théoden, who is crushed beneath his horse. The Lord of the Nazgûl descends on his huge, winged steed.

Even when he's completely exhausted, Merry's curious spirit doesn't relent. He doesn't thrive on being ignored or cast aside—he'd rather be a part of the action, or at least know what's going on, which is why he follows the lantern light. Ghân's willingness to help Rohan suggests both that he's desperate for the orcs to be defeated, because their tendency to destroy nature is a threat to his home, and that he trusts Rohan's honor enough to reveal the existence of his people to them and offer them help.



Éomer's reaction to the destruction of the wall proves he's an innovative and resourceful strategist—a strength that will allow him to profit off Mordor's arrogance and brutality in this instance. The Wild Man's connection and communion with nature provides the Rohirrim with knowledge and hope they would've otherwise overlooked, suggesting that the power of nature is in more than just its beauty, and Mordor's disregard of it may contribute to their downfall.



Dernhelm's change in position suggest he has a special loyalty or connection to Théoden that Merry has yet to understand. Despite all his courage and curiosity, Merry is beginning to realize he has no idea how to help in battle and might be out of his depth. Nevertheless, the Rohirrim's arrival at Minas Tirith comes hand in hand with the changing wind and the retreat of the shadow, suggesting their strength and impending victory is a force of nature, and will go similarly undetected by Mordor's troops.



It becomes clear that the shadow is not only intended to cause despair among the free armies, but to protect Mordor and assist in their troops' strength. That one side of the war relies on darkness, the other on light, is a sign that they're fundamentally opposed and their differences become strategic touchstones in battle.



Though many of Théoden's knights have been slain or carried away by their spooked horses, Dernhelm and Merry are alive nearby. When Dernhelm speaks to the Lord of the Nazgûl, ordering him to leave the dead, his voice sounds familiar to Merry. The Rider refuses to move and tells Dernhelm that no living man can harm him. Merry realizes that Dernhelm is really Éowyn when she takes her helmet off and shows the Black Rider that she is, in fact, a woman. As she strikes off the head of the winged beast, the shadow overhead passes away.

Merry feels the urge to help Éowyn and crawls towards the Lord of the Nazgûl. The Nazgûl strikes Éowyn and shatters her shield, but Merry stabs him behind the knee so that his fatal shot misses her. Éowyn uses the last of her strength to drive her sword into the Black Rider's face. The Rider's armor falls to the ground, seemingly empty, and a cry rises from the place where his body vanished. Merry blinks through tears to see Éowyn and Théoden lying around him unmoving.

Merry goes to kiss Théoden's hand. Théoden opens his eyes, and he tells Merry he is passing on to the land of his fathers. He asks to see Éomer before he dies, and to send word to Éowyn, who he believes to be back in Dunharrow. Merry tries to tell Théoden that Éowyn is beside him, but a clamor of trumpets sounds and he sees that the Riders are surging towards them. The horses refuse to approach the carcass of the winged beast, so Éomer dismounts to approach the king's body. Théoden signals that the banner be given to Éomer who is now king of Rohan, and he dies in the same moment. Éomer urges the soldiers not to grieve their king, though he himself weeps as he orders the knights to bear the body away.

Éomer then recognizes Éowyn's body. His grief spurs him to rejoin the battle and he rallies his soldiers to assail the remaining enemy forces. Merry is left behind. He sees that the sword he used to stab the Lord of the Nazgûl is smoking and soon consumed by fire. His sword-arm has gone numb. The king's men set a fence of spears up around the fallen Rohirrim. They burn the carcass of the winged beast and dig a grave for Théoden's horse. They carry Théoden and Éowyn into Minas Tirith; Merry walks with them.

Rain begins to fall. Prince Imrahil rides out to greet the knights and weeps over Théoden's body, but notices that Éowyn is still, barely, alive. He orders help be brought for her from the city before riding into battle himself. The fighting goes on, and although the Rohirrim overthrew the frontlines, they are outnumbered by the proceeding onslaught. Hope begins to disappear again—and the men on the city walls see a new threat approaching in the form of a fleet of ships arriving on the river. They proclaim this to be “the last stroke of doom.”

Mordor's arrogance is fully embodied by the Lord of the Nazgûl, whose assurance in his immunity to challenging soldiers is based on his assumption that there are no exceptions to his prophetic strength. It's a sign that there are more small, less obvious ways that Mordor can be defeated, partly because they've refused to consider the possibility that they could be defeated.



Éowyn and Merry's differences in appearance and status from the other Rohirrim are advantages, not weaknesses, here. The prophetic nature of their success against the Black Rider amplifies the significance of this moment—it's a vital point in the battle between both sides and perhaps a sign that Gondor and their allies have a chance of success.



The fact that the Rohirrim's horses refuse to approach the body of the Black Rider's steed is a sign that Mordor's animals have been bred in such oppressive captivity and such inhumane conditions that they've become unnatural, showing once again Mordor's disregard for the pure strength of nature. Meanwhile, Théoden's gracious acceptance of death shows that he feels he's redeemed himself on the battlefield after years of being corrupted by Saruman and unable to honorably lead his people.



The effect of the Lord of the Nazgûl's terror is clearly not constrained to his own body and not ended by his death, either, which is proven by Merry's smoking sword and his numb arm. The effects of his extreme bravery against an outsized foe begin to take their toll, which suggests it's not enough to show bravery in one moment—that same bravery is demanded during the recovery process, too.



The other soldiers' assumption that Éowyn had died along with Théoden is representative of the chaos of battle and the lack of careful treatment its casualties receive. This moment is another reminder of the wild oscillations of hope and despair in wartime, and that despair could easily become surrender.



The sight of the approaching ships encourages the armies of Mordor, and they fight with renewed strength. Éomer rallies his men to form a shield-wall and prepare for their last stand. But as he recites a battle verse, he sees a banner unfurling on the first ship to show the **White Tree** of Gondor embellished with a crown and seven stars—the sign of the king. The Rohirrim see that Aragorn and his company have arrived. They drive the enemy into Aragorn's path. At last, Éomer and Aragorn meet on the battlefield, just as Aragorn predicted before they left Helm's Deep. By nightfall, the enemy is defeated in Gondor, though not without huge losses.

This is a moment in which hope—namely, Aragorn's hope that he and Éomer would meet again in battle—may seem the least logical attitude, but it is more potent than despair. Mordor's armies' misplaced hope in the arrival of the Black Ships shows that their fortitude comes from the reassurance that they're larger in number than their enemy. Now that he's begun to fulfil his role as Gondor's true king, Aragorn's strength is growing into a huge sign of hope for Gondor. He's a new leader for them to rally around now that both Denethor and Faramir are absent from the battlefield.



BOOK 5, CHAPTER 7

When the Black Rider withdraws from the city to join the battle on the field, Pippin cries for Gandalf to come with him to save Faramir. He explains that Denethor has gone to the tombs and will burn himself and his son alive if he's not stopped. Gandalf knows that if he goes to save Faramir, many in the battle will die without his help. Nevertheless, he goes with Pippin and tells Prince Imrahil to take command. Pippin and Gandalf ride up to the entrance to the tombs. As they walk towards the House of the Stewards where Denethor is lighting his fire, they hear swords clashing: Beregond is fighting off Denethor's guard.

Gandalf's decision is one that represents the choice between helping many in battle and rescuing one vulnerable, important figure. Gandalf's decision might rest on the fact that those in battle have gone willingly, while Faramir has no way to defend himself from his father. Beregond's renegade behavior shows that Denethor's loss of perspective is obvious to his soldiers, and that Pippin has been persuasive in his request for Beregond's help.



Denethor appears from the door that Beregond is guarding, holding a sword. Gandalf storms towards Denethor, casting the sword into the air. He asks Denethor why he's lighting a funeral pyre while he and his son are still alive. He judges Denethor to be mad and lifts Faramir from the pyre to carry him away. Denethor weeps to see his son taken from him, but Gandalf tells him Faramir must be given the chance to heal; meanwhile, Denethor's responsibility is to join the battle with his people. Denethor sees no hope and would rather burn with his son, but Gandalf tells him he doesn't have the power to choose his own death.

Gandalf's belief that hope is both stronger and wiser than despair is the impetus for his drastic behavior towards Denethor here: he no longer relies on Denethor realizing the potential for Faramir's recovery or Gondor's success, so he has to personally remove Faramir from Denethor's grasp. It's nobler, in Gandalf's mind, to face the threat of defeat rather than surrendering to it without even attempting to succeed.



Denethor watches Gandalf take Faramir away, but when Gandalf calls him to follow, he laughs instead. He shows Gandalf that he was using a **Seeing Stone** as his pillow on the pyre, and that through it he has learned that the war is hopeless for Gondor. He believes that Gandalf hopes to rule in his stead, using Aragorn as a puppet, and in any case, he refuses to accept Aragorn's claim to the throne. Gandalf tells Denethor he has no right to end his son's life, at which Denethor draws a knife on him. Beregond stands to Gandalf's defense, which Denethor interprets as Gandalf having turned his men against him. In a sudden motion, Denethor sets the pyre alight and leaps onto it, still holding the Seeing Stone. Gandalf closes the door on Denethor's burning body.

Denethor's despair has been fueled by his belief that he possesses more knowledge and wisdom than Gandalf and can therefore reject his encouragement to be optimistic about Gondor's chances. But Denethor's presumed wisdom leads him away from prudent decisions and into the path of assumption and miscommunication, revealing that no matter how much information one has, it's never a sure indicator of failure or success. The future can never be accurately predicted, and Gandalf's actions suggest that even the smallest chance of survival shouldn't be written off.



Gandalf tells Denethor's knights that their obedience would've led to Faramir's death had Beregond not disobeyed his orders. He and Pippin take Faramir to the Houses of Healing. As they walk, they hear a blast of noise: the House of the Stewards in which Denethor burned himself cracks and crumbles into ruins. Beregond reveals he took the key from the porter when he went to Faramir's rescue. He offers the key to Gandalf, who tells him to keep it safe until Minas Tirith has been defended.

As they reach the Houses of Healing, Gandalf, Pippin, and Beregond hear a piercing cry and see the sun breaking through the **shadow**. Though this brings new hope, Gandalf can sense there's grief, too—he tells Pippin and Beregond to take Faramir inside while he goes to the wall to observe the battle wreckage. When Beregond and Pippin return to him, he tells them that it's a time for both joy and sorrow—had Denethor not put Faramir in danger, Gandalf may have prevented some of the loss. He says that the **Seeing Stone** was in part responsible for Denethor's descent into delusion. Though Denethor was strong enough to avoid complete deception by Sauron, he was still overcome by the images of threat and despair he saw in the Stone.

Pippin says that this explains the change in Denethor between leaving and returning to Faramir's side. Beregond supports this theory with his description of the bright light in the high tower at that time: Denethor must have been looking into the **Stone**. Gandalf confirms that this is the way Sauron caused Denethor's downfall. But now he must go down to the battlefield: he's seen something very sad. He brings Pippin with him, telling Beregond to stand guard over Faramir.

BOOK 5, CHAPTER 8

Merry reaches the smoldering city in a haze beside the bodies of Théoden and Éowyn. Suddenly his vision goes dark and he feels as though he's walking into a tomb. Soon, he's stopped by Pippin who has been searching for him, and he sits down and weeps. Pippin asks if he is wounded—Merry says no, but that his sword-arm has gone numb. Pippin hurries him up the levels of the city towards the Houses of Healing. Merry is too weak to make it all the way, but Bergil runs past on an errand for the Healers and Pippin asks him to send for help for Merry. Soon, Gandalf arrives to take Merry to the Houses of Healing. He comments that Merry should have been carried from battle in honor, just like Théoden and Éowyn.

Denethor's death and the subsequent crumbling of the House of the Stewards is a symbol of the end of this era in Gondor's history, making way for a new form of leadership. Meanwhile, Gandalf's decision to entrust the key to Beregond shows that he values, rather than condemns, Beregond's treasonous actions which were a product of necessity. He is opposed to the idea that soldiers should blindly follow a corrupted leader.



The victory of Gondor and Rohan has been hard won, and they've suffered substantial and important losses. Gandalf laments his own fallibility—his decision to save Faramir meant he gave up the chance to prevent significant loss in battle. Indeed, it wasn't Denethor himself that led to Gandalf's fateful decision, but Sauron's evil which was able to infiltrate Minas Tirith by way of the Seeing Stone. It's clear that Sauron is still using his ability to spread despair and doubt to his advantage.



Even after Beregond's treason, Gandalf trusts him with guarding Faramir, which is another sign that Gandalf has less respect for the official offices of power than for an individual person's ability to make difficult decisions and remain loyal to truth over authority.



Though Merry hasn't been significantly wounded, coming into such close contact with the Black Rider has the effect of a tangible, encroaching darkness—the physical embodiment of despair as an illness. Pippin's ability to find Merry in the chaotic aftermath of battle speaks to the strength of the friendship between the two hobbits, who haven't stopped thinking of each other since they were separated. And though Merry fought for Rohan and Gondor with huge bravery, his difference in status still limits him to the role of a helper while others are honored.



Faramir, Éowyn, and Merry are laid in the Houses of Healing, where the Healers are unsure how to deal with what they call the Black **Shadow**—an affliction brought through contact with the Black Riders. The afflicted patients have been slipping deeper into dreams before dying. This is what they think Éowyn and Merry suffer from. Ioreth, the oldest healer, recounts an old phrase: “The hands of the king are the hands of a healer.” Upon hearing this, Gandalf goes to fetch Aragorn.

Aragorn, Éomer, and Imrahil reach the city gate. Aragorn decides not to enter the city: he believes Denethor to be alive and wants to avoid conflict and confusion that could arise in a power struggle. He orders his banner to be furled again. Éomer and Imrahil enter the city, looking to meet with Denethor. In the hall of the citadel, they find Théoden’s body clothed in gold. Imrahil asks the guards where the Steward of Gondor is. They tell him he’s in the Houses of Healing. Éomer asks why Éowyn has not been laid beside Théoden, and Imrahil tells him she is not dead. They both go to the Houses of Healing.

Gandalf greets them and says that Éowyn is near death, and Faramir, who is the new Steward of Gondor, is sick with poison from the dart. Imrahil asks who will lead the city while Faramir is sick. A cloaked man next to Gandalf steps forward to reveal himself as Aragorn. But he won’t take on the title of king yet—he has only come to help the sick, and Imrahil should rule Minas Tirith for the time being. Gandalf ushers them all inside to deal urgently with the sick.

Pippin is waiting at the door when he sees Aragorn, and he greets him with joy and surprise. Imrahil is surprised to hear Aragorn being called “Strider,” and Aragorn tells him that the high language translation of “Strider” will in fact be the name of his house when he takes the throne. They enter the room where the sick lie. Aragorn tends first to Faramir, then to Éowyn and Merry, and judges that he’ll have to use all his skill and strength to attempt to heal them. He asks Ioreth whether the herb-master has kingsfoil. Ioreth tells him they don’t use it as a healing herb—she doesn’t know that it has any use. Nevertheless, Aragorn tells her to fetch any she can find.

Aragorn thinks Faramir has fallen under the Dark Shadow, too, and his condition has been worsened by the despair brought on by Denethor’s cruelty. He kneels beside Faramir, calling his name more and more faintly. Bergil runs in with six leaves of kingsfoil. Aragorn breathes on two of the leaves and crushes them, and the air is filled with their fresh scent. He puts the leaves in bowls of hot water and holds one bowl to Faramir’s face. Faramir opens his eyes, fully conscious, and addresses Aragorn as king. Aragorn moves on to the other patients.

The Black Shadow is a manifestation of Sauron’s evil in the form of a sickness, whose symptoms mimic that of heartbreak and despair. While this speaks to the potency of hopelessness and its ability to end life, it also suggests that defeating Sauron will require an unprecedented amount of hope in the face of ever-growing despair.



Aragorn’s priority is for Gondor to rally quickly without being distracted by ceremony and the chaos of changing leadership. He’s able to put aside any desire for honor or recognition in order to give Gondor their best chance in defeating Sauron. This quality differentiates him from Denethor, who focused constantly on his own status and the symbolic, rather than practical, strength of the kingdom.



Aragorn continues to prove his humility through his cloaked appearance—his presence here is only due to his ability to help, not because he’s reclaiming his city. He’s consistently more focused on duty and service rather than his symbolic role, even choosing to have Imrahil lead Minas Tirith in his stead.



Even though Aragorn has begun to take on the airs of his kingship—commanding the army of the Dead and unfurling his banner—he’s foremostly a beloved friend and companion rather than a ruler, which is why Pippin feels comfortable calling him Strider, the casual label given to him as a Ranger of the North. In fact, Aragorn’s proud of this label, and he’ll continue to be identified in this way even at the height of his power.



Bergil’s reappearance here reminds the reader that the small tasks of less powerful people, like Bergil who’s been giving the role of an errand-runner, can change the course of a whole life. Aragorn’s gift here is both prophetic and mystical—it seems that his breath imbues the leaves with a healing property—which emphasizes his role as the heir to Gondor’s throne and their hope of survival.



When Aragorn sees Éowyn, he describes her sadness as a sickness that began long ago. Éomer says he didn't know that Éowyn felt such despair for so many years. Gandalf tells him that it was not only Wormtongue's treachery that made her feel trapped in Edoras, but her status as a woman which kept her from the same freedoms of riding and fighting that Éomer is used to. Éomer considers for the first time Éowyn's feelings of frustration. Éomer thought that she only became sad when her love for Aragorn was unrequited. Aragorn confirms this is also a cause of Éowyn's grief, but says she does not truly know him, and loves only an idea of him.

Aragorn knows he can revive Éowyn, but if she wakes into despair she won't survive. He crushes the herb again and tells Éomer to call to her. Éowyn wakes up and asks Éomer whether it's true that Théoden is dead—he confirms this. Éowyn rests, saying that though she might regain health if she's made helpful in battle, she does not know if she can find any hope in her life.

Finally, Aragorn goes to revive Merry. He is confident that Merry's buoyant spirit will help him recover quickly. Merry wakes and asks for supper and a pipe, but quickly rescinds his second request at the memory of Théoden, who told him that one day they would smoke together. Aragorn tells him to smoke and remember his friend fondly. Pippin stays with Merry while Gandalf and Aragorn leave, finding a crowd has gathered at the door to see Aragorn. A rumor has spread that he is the king, returning to the throne. He works into the night healing those wounded in battle before returning to his tent outside the city walls to rest. When the banner of Prince Imrahil is raised the next morning, the people of the city wonder if their sight of the king was just a dream.

BOOK 5, CHAPTER 9

In the morning, Gimli and Legolas bring a message to Imrahil that Aragorn wants captains to gather at his tent to plan their next move against the enemy. After speaking with Imrahil, they go to see Merry and Pippin. The four walk and sit together. Merry begs Gimli and Legolas to recount their journey since leaving Helm's Deep. Gimli refuses—the terror is still too vivid—but Legolas, having been less afraid, tells them the story. He says that the **shadow** that had hung overhead had seemed to strengthen the army of the Dead, who were obedient to Aragorn the whole way.

Éomer's ability to overlook Éowyn's lifelong frustration with her status is presumably due to his comfort in his role, and his resulting assumption that Éowyn, being of equal rank to him, feels similarly at ease with her own role. He hasn't taken into account that her gender has removed her ability to behave with honor and bravery in the way he takes for granted. He realizes now that her heartbreak, which he thought was isolated only to Aragorn's inability to reciprocate her love, comes from the restriction she's felt for her whole life.



Aragorn tells Éomer to call to Éowyn because he knows this will be a more powerful way of bringing her back to life. That is, her connection with Éomer comes from a truer and fuller love than her desire to be loved by Aragorn—a fantasy that will never come true or bring satisfaction.



Merry's optimism allows him to recover quicker than Éowyn, who will have to wrestle with not only the Black Shadow but her existing despair and frustration. In fact, Merry's ability to experience grief and joy simultaneously are echoed when he resolves to smoke his pipe even though it'll bring back memories of Théoden. Meanwhile, rumors of hope have replaced those of despair in Minas Tirith, with a crowd gathering to see the man they assume is their new king. But instead of claiming the glory on the spot, Aragorn remains focused on the ways he can serve as a healer and leader, so he leaves the city to sleep outside in a tent.



Like Éomer's ability to make use of Gondor's broken wall, this is another instance where Mordor's weapons and destruction prove useful for Gondor, transforming a symbol of despair into one of power. Legolas's relative lack of fear in proximity to the Dead is a reminder that, as an Elf, his relationship with death is imbued with less horror than it is for mortals like Men and Dwarves.



When they reached the river, Legolas explains, the Dead swept through the enemy and took the ships for Aragorn's company. The fear that the Dead brought to the enemy was more powerful than any weapon. After they took the ships, Aragorn held the Dead's oath fulfilled, and they departed. Gimli tells Merry and Pippin that the armies of men that had been fighting nearby then came to Aragorn's aid and joined his company. At that point, Gimli doubted they would reach Minas Tirith in time to help, but Legolas had told him to cheer up—a new wind began to blow which gave the boats more speed, and they were able to join the battle in order to win back victory.

Imrahil sends for Éomer and they descend the levels of the city together to meet Aragorn, Gandalf, Elladan, and Elrohir. Gandalf urges them to consider Denethor's final words—a prediction of defeat. The **Seeing Stone** showed Denethor only what Sauron wanted him to see, but it's also impossible for the Stone to show false images, so Gandalf knows that Denethor's despair was not totally unjustified: there must indeed be huge forces gathering in Mordor. Gandalf still hopes for victory in the war but believes it cannot be achieved by force. He suggests that Sauron can only be defeated if the **Ring** is destroyed—so their only option is to act as a distraction in order to give Frodo a chance to reach Mount Doom.

Aragorn concurs with Gandalf, but he allows the other captains to choose whether to follow. Elrond's sons agree to the plan. Imrahil does too, but as the acting Steward of Gondor, he reserves a large group of his men to guard the city. They count their numbers and agree to leave in two days with a 7,000-strong army. Once their strategy has been planned, Imrahil laughs and exclaims that the plan seems like a huge joke—there's no way they can pose a threat to Mordor with such a weakened army. He asks Gandalf whether Sauron will even take them seriously. But Gandalf replies that Sauron considers some among them serious threats, and Aragorn adds that if it is in fact a joke, it's not one to laugh about.

BOOK 5, CHAPTER 10

Two days later, the army assembles. Merry is dismayed to find he won't be going, as he still needs to rest, but Aragorn tells him not to envy Pippin's place in the battle: Merry has already been able to prove himself with noble deeds. The trumpets sound and the army moves off. Merry is left lonely again. Everyone he cares for has gone into battle. Bergil, who has been standing beside Merry watching the army leave, tries to cheer him by suggesting that, with the strength of Gandalf and Aragorn, the army cannot fail.

Though Mordor's strength has been increased by the fear that precedes them, here, it's obvious that fear works against them in just the same way. The sensation of fear rather than the tangible weapons of the Dead army is the key to Aragorn's victory on the Black Ships, demonstrating that despair can be potent enough to drive an army to surrender if they're not buoyed by transcendent hope.



Gandalf's strategy is a combination of hope and realism. He doesn't suggest the captains search for hope in battle; rather, they should pin their faith on Frodo and Sam, and their motivation should come from the slim chance the hobbits have of fulfilling their quest. Gandalf and Aragorn request a huge display of faith and sacrifice from the captains, and their honesty about the low odds of individual survival shows that they trust their allies to show great loyalty and fortitude.



Imrahil doesn't try to ignore the hopelessness of the situation, but his decision to reserve some troops to defend Minas Tirith shows that he can envision a situation in which hope prevails in some form. Put another way, he's able to hold doom in one hand and faith in the other rather than submitting to one the other. Gandalf is more optimistic about their strategy's success, because he knows that Sauron, though powerful, is still threatened by the symbolic strength Gandalf and Aragorn possess.



Merry's motivation at all times is to help his friends, and, just like the days before the battle, he feels helpless and lonely knowing that he can't do anything for them. Though Bergil suggests that the army has a good chance, that's not really the cause of Merry's worry—it's more that he can't face the danger beside his friends.



The horsemen at the head of the army reach a crossroads where a statue of an old king of Gondor has been defaced. Aragorn sets trumpeters at each path of the crossroads to blow a fanfare and declare that Gondor has returned to reclaim the land, and orders that the statue be cleaned and repaired. They continue towards Mordor flanked by scouts. Though the weather has cleared, the smog of Mordor is permanent. Gandalf gives intermittent orders for a fanfare to sound, and for the men to proclaim the return of the king of Gondor, but the challenge is never met by the enemy.

At one point, the leading party, having been warned by their scouts, defeats an enemy ambush. Their victory is small and feels hollow—they know it's just a tease. From then on, Legolas senses the Nazgûl flying high above. They bring a feeling of unshakeable dread to the whole army. The next day, some of the soldiers become so paralyzed by despair that Aragorn allows them to turn back. Six days after their departure from Minas Tirith, the army reaches the Black Gate.

The Gate is closed. Aragorn arranges the army before riding with the rest of the captains to the Gate, along with a large guard. Pippin, Gimli, and Legolas join the guard as representatives of their people. They call for Sauron to meet them and atone for his destruction. At the end of a long silence, an embassy emerges from the Gate, led not by Sauron but a towering figure on a huge, terrifying horse. He tells them he is the Mouth of Sauron—a high-ranking servant of Sauron who has served for long enough to have forgotten his own name. He asks if there is anyone with the authority to speak with him. Aragorn meets his eye, and the Mouth recoils as if he's been stung.

The Mouth of Sauron recognizes Gandalf and tells him his plan is foolish. He says he was instructed by Sauron to show Gandalf a token. One of his party comes forward with a bundle which the Mouth of Sauron reveals to be Frodo's clothes and Sam's sword. Pippin cries out when he sees them, which proves to the Mouth that the items are important to this group. Gandalf asks him why he has shown them the tokens; the Mouth of Sauron says that they are proof of Gandalf's conspiracy to send spies into Mordor.

As on the Paths of the Dead, dread seems to increase with the lack of the enemy's presence—it's impossible to tell what kind of power awaits Aragorn's company as they move ahead. However, even though he hasn't claimed the honors that go along with the kingship, Aragorn is using his nobility to a tactical advantage, knowing that he's a symbol of Gondor's strength that Sauron still fears.



Aragorn demonstrates his leadership not through shows of strength or unquestioned authority, but when he shows others mercy. He's a merciful leader whose strength only increases when he shows his soldiers understanding and care, suggesting he knows this is an effective way to earn their loyalty.



The presence of representatives of all free peoples of Middle-earth suggests that this is their ultimate challenge to Sauron and the moment in which they demand him to answer for all the pain he's caused them. He sends his ambassador instead of going himself, implying both that he could be threatened by the army, or that his plan relies on his own distance from the battle. That the Mouth of Sauron has forgotten his own name after serving Sauron shows that Sauron is more focused on amassing strength in numbers rather than valuing the individual traits of his soldiers.



Pippin's cry at seeing Frodo and Sam's items is the confirmation the Mouth of Sauron needs that the two hobbits are familiar to Gandalf and his companions, showing that Sauron and his servants will use the most vulnerable people and the purest friendships to their own advantage.



The Mouth of Sauron offers to deliver Frodo if Gandalf agrees to Sauron's terms. Gandalf asks for the terms: they dictate that Gondor withdraws, that Sauron claims all lands east of the Anduin River, and that all other lands are free for men to govern without weapons. Sauron would also claim Isengard and the men would rebuild it for him. Gandalf asks for proof that Frodo is alive before he agrees to the terms. The Mouth of Sauron refuses. Gandalf takes Sam and Frodo's belongings, and he rejects the terms. The Mouth of Sauron, filled with fear and confusion, retreats back to the Gate, but at that same moment, Mordor's battle horns sound.

The Black Gates open wide. A huge army emerges, and Aragorn's guard retreats quickly, but their army is surrounded by orcs and men of the enemy. Aragorn's banner is raised. The sun is shrouded by Mordor's plumes of smoke and appears red as if the day is ending. All hope seems to disappear. Pippin resigns himself to death. Beregond is struck down by a troll who leers down at Pippin. Pippin stabs upwards at the troll who then falls and crushes him. Darkness descends on Pippin, but in his last moments of consciousness he hears voices crying, "The Eagles are coming!"

BOOK 6, CHAPTER 1

Sam picks himself off the ground and tries to remember why he fell: it was when he threw himself at the doors of Cirith Ungol. He sees there's no hope now of entering by that door, but he has no choice but to try to rescue Frodo. As he searches for his way back along the tunnel, he wonders if the others in the Fellowship think of him and Frodo at all. At this point in time, Aragorn has taken the fleet at the river, Merry is a day away from Minas Tirith with the Rohirrim, and Pippin waits on Denethor, and all of their minds are incessantly on the whereabouts and survival of Sam and Frodo. Still, the two hobbits are alone and beyond anyone's help.

Sam finds himself back at the outlet of Shelob's tunnel. He looks up at Cirith Ungol, a tower held by orcs, and his fear returns. He retraces his steps back to the place where the orcs passed him in their retrieval of Frodo. Sam feels that if he steps any further, he won't ever return from Mordor. In his fear, he takes out the **Ring** and puts it on; he feels its huge weight and the searching evil of Mordor. With the Ring on, Sam's hearing seems sharper but his sight is less reliable. He soon realizes that even his hearing is deceiving him: the orcs he thought were passing nearby are actually fighting in the tower above. Sam remembers his duty—he must rescue Frodo—and, taking the Ring off, he begins to run.

Gandalf's actions here show that he'd rather take his chances on true victory than ensure a tiny amount of safety for the price of freedom. Though their chances are slim, Aragorn's army is hopeful and willing to make sacrifices, not just accept a halfhearted success that would lead to enslavement and more despair. The speed with which Mordor's armies emerge from the Gate shows that Sauron planned for Gandalf to reject the Mouth of Sauron's deal.



Even when they lack all hope, Aragorn's army, including Pippin, fight with a great deal of bravery. Their motivation comes from more than pragmatism or the chance of success—the idea of freedom and their role in achieving it drives them onward.



Sam is troubled not only by the physical danger he's in, but by feelings of isolation and uncertainty. Being so far from the other members of the Fellowship, he has no choice but to struggle onwards without knowing whether anyone is thinking of him or Frodo. With this, the novel suggests that isolation and despair will have just as much of an effect on Sam's ability to carry on as will his physical ability.



It's clear here that the Ring is most powerful when its bearer is vulnerable and threatened—its hold on the desire of its bearer means that it's most tempting when the bearer has a desperate need. And, like the Seeing Stone, its power is dangerously fickle—though Sam feels his hearing improves when he wears the Ring, this isn't actually the case. This suggests that a huge power such as the Ring needs to be properly understood in order to be useful.



Sam sees Mount Doom in the distance and its spiral plume of smoke. The glow from the mountain allows Sam to see the whole of Cirith Ungol more clearly, and it's larger and more threatening than he thought. He realizes that the tower's purpose is not to keep enemies out but to imprison them. It was in fact built in defense by men of Gondor but was then taken by the Lord of the Nazgûl and held by Mordor. Sam sees how hopeless his task is; he cannot possibly enter without being noticed.

Sam considers the **Ring** again, but he understands that its power is growing and it is dangerous to wield. He feels that even carrying the Ring makes him more important and powerful—he knows it tempts him with the promise of strength. He avoids the temptation both because of his devotion to Frodo and through his “plain hobbit-sense” that reminds him his place is as a gardener, not a ruler. The only thing to do is go to the main gate of the tower, no matter how doomed that way might be.

As Sam nears the gate, two orcs come running past before falling dead. Sam wonders what the conflict is between Shagrat and Gorbag. He knows they've been ordered not to kill Frodo, but he remembers Frodo's mithril mail—that's probably what the orcs are fighting about. Sam urges himself forward but finds he cannot pass through the gate. Some invisible force seems to hold him back. He looks up to see two huge stone statues that guard the gate and keep out intruders. Sam thinks to use the phial of Galadriel: he holds it up and shows its light and is then able to leap through the gate. As he enters, he hears a shrill cry alarming those in the tower of his entry.

Sam expects to be surrounded by orcs, but none come. He sees that the courtyard is littered with dead orcs. He enters the tower unchallenged but doesn't know which path to take; he decides to climb as high as he can. The only thought that keeps him moving forward is of Frodo in danger or pain. Suddenly, hearing someone running towards him, Sam stops. He finds himself clutching at the **Ring** but doesn't put it on before an orc hurtles down the stairs ahead and stops short of him. But the orc doesn't see a hobbit—he sees a huge, cloaked shadow, and assumes Sam to be a terrifying enemy. The orc runs back up the stairs. Sam climbs up after him but much more slowly.

The way that Mordor's red glow and dark smog alter Sam's perception and make him feel more daunted and powerless exemplifies the idea that dread and despair make a difficult task seem impossible. Nothing has physically changed about the Tower, but Sam feels more threatened by it because he's seeing it from a different perspective.



Despite his fear, Sam knows the only thing for him to do is to keep moving forward until it's impossible. He knows that using the Ring to increase his power is a trick—he's not suited for grand ambitions, and his role is to help Frodo, not to command armies. Sam's narrow focus will be his greatest strength.



Sam's use of the phial of Galadriel shows that the force keeping him from entering the tower is similar to Sauron's other forces in its hatred of darkness, and further implies that Sauron relies on darkness and despair in order to control his lands and defeat the enemy.



Sam's hopeless feeling about entering the tower is overshadowed by the confusion he feels at seeing piles of dead orcs. It seems that, once again, the orcs' desire for violence and destruction has worked in their enemies' favor, leaving a clear path for Sam to venture through just as their destruction of the wall in Gondor meant they could no longer defend the land they violently claimed. Their greed is once again leading to their own demise.



Just when Sam feels he can't climb any more, the stairs come to an end. He hears through a closed door two arguing voices. Shagrat is demanding that Snaga leave the tower to deliver some news. Snaga refuses, flouting Shagrat's authority; he believes that a man of Gondor has found his way into the tower. Shagrat hurls Snaga from the room and Snaga eventually disappears from Shagrat's view. Sam sees all this, and also sees a fallen orc moving. The orc grabs the bundle Shagrat is holding and moves to stab him with a broken spear, but Shagrat slits his throat first.

Sam knows he won't go unnoticed for long. He leaps out at Shagrat with a cry. Shagrat, holding the bundle, cannot fight Sam, but he uses the bundle as a shield and slips away. Sam moves to follow him but remembers Frodo and continues his search. He climbs until he reaches a dead end, though he thinks the tower has another level. He sits down, tired and defeated, but to his own surprise he begins to sing a simple Shire tune, adding his own words. He thinks he hears a voice answering the tune, and stops singing, but now all he hears is Snaga ordering someone to stop singing. He sees Snaga climb a ladder at the end of the passage and realizes that the high chamber can only be reached through a trapdoor.

Sam hears the crack of a whip and, filled with rage, follows Snaga up the ladder to the chamber. He leaps towards Snaga and cuts his arm off. Snaga fights back, but he gets thrown off balance and falls through the trapdoor. Sam runs to Frodo and holds him. Frodo asks him if he's dreaming, and he tells him he was answering Sam's song when he heard it coming from below. Sam wants to sit with Frodo and bask in his happiness, but he knows they must get up and leave. He looks for something for Frodo to wear. Frodo begins to despair, telling Sam the orcs took everything from him and their quest has failed.

Sam tells Frodo that he has the **Ring**. Frodo demands Sam give it back to him, and when Sam suggests they share the burden, Frodo calls him a thief. Frodo's immediately ashamed of his behavior and explains that the burden is his alone to carry. Sam forgives him and returns to the task of finding clothes, telling Frodo to wait in the tower until he's found orc garb that will help them blend in on their journey. Frodo worries as he waits, but Sam returns quickly with a pile of dirty, ill-fitting clothes, and they both attempt to dress well enough to be disguised in Mordor.

Once again, the rumor of a threat is more potent than the threat itself, which is apparent when Snaga thinks Sam, a small hobbit, is really a man of Gondor due to the size of his shadow. As in Denethor's case, presumption and anticipation of the worst have become the orcs' greatest weakness.



Sam's song and (presumably) Frodo's reply, and the subsequent revelation of the trapdoor, suggests that even in the face of danger and violence, beauty has a place and purpose. And though Sam feels hopeless, he's still able to come up with his own words to a Shire tune, which implies that the comforts of home and the capacity for creativity are integral to his character.



Even in the darkest place he's yet entered, Sam is able to feel overwhelming joy when he finds Frodo alive. This emphasizes both the huge capacity he has for delight, and the strength of his loyalty and love for Frodo: the most important thing for Sam is that Frodo is still alive, so in his mind, he's achieved a huge victory.



Frodo's behavior shows that he is both hugely affected by the Ring and under the power of its temptation, and still self-aware enough to know that he's acted irrationally and unkindly towards Sam. This dual existence weighs perhaps more heavily than a complete surrender to the Ring would, and it shows that Frodo has to have an unprecedentedly strong character in order to carry the Ring and avoid succumbing to its power.



Frodo asks if Sam has any food or drink to offer. Sam remembers he hasn't eaten for a long time; he has a little lembas bread—the Elvish bread they were gifted upon leaving Lothlórien—but only a drop of water in his bottle. Frodo finds that the orcs left his food bag, but he only has the same amount as Sam does. Still, he doesn't move until Sam has a bite to eat. They don't think any more about the water, knowing that their journey is hopeless as it stands, and their lack of water won't make a difference.

Frodo and Sam descend the tower. At the gate, they find the statues' resistance impossible to pass. Sam once again shines the phial of Galadriel, and they both cry phrases in Elvish. They stumble past the gate and onto the road, narrowly escaping the collapsing arch. Another cry emits from the gate which is answered by a winged figure in the sky.

BOOK 6, CHAPTER 2

Sam urges Frodo to run. A Nazgûl has descended beside the tower, and they hear its high-pitched shrieks. After running for a while, Frodo says that they look suspicious—if they were orcs, they would be running into the tower, not from it. They reach a bridge and climb over the side to hide from the orcs they hear approaching. They land in a patch of thorny brambles and wait for the orcs to pass overhead. As they hurry on into the valley, the **shadow** above begins to disperse a little in the distance, and light filters through.

Frodo and Sam hear the piercing cry of a Black Rider, but this time it's full of grief rather than terror. Sam feels that something is changing abroad. Frodo doesn't share his hope, because they're moving further into danger, not away from it. They share a bite of bread and walk on. Out of a jagged cliff they're shocked to hear the trickling of water. Sam asks to drink first to check for poison, but Frodo says they'll drink together. If they'd been drinking this water in the Shire, they would've found it unpleasant, but here and now it's better than they could dream of.

After several more miles, Frodo needs to find a place to rest. He and Sam scramble through thorny, fly-infested brambles until he becomes too exhausted to go further. They crawl beneath a patch of brambles. They're thirsty again and doubt they'll find any more water on their journey. While Frodo sleeps, Sam looks out of the thicket and sees a bright star shining through the shadows in the sky. The sight of it brings him great hope and he forgets for a moment the peril of their journey.

Though Sam plays the role of Frodo's servant, it's clear that Frodo thinks of him more as an equal companion, which means he ensures that Sam eats when he does even if it means he'll have less food to sustain him. The two hobbits are able to continue on their journey even in the face of hopelessness, suggesting that they've accepted the reality of their situation but are motivated by the chance of success.



The hobbits' use of Elvish in this situation shows that they've grown and accumulated at least a little knowledge of the greater world of Middle-earth since leaving home, and also highlights their respect for the Elven culture that gifted them the phial.



Though Sam and Frodo are heading further into Mordor and will continue to be shrouded in shadow, the sight of the shadow clearing far away offers a little hope, which suggests that the idea of their friends' survival is a major motivation for their journey.



The fact that the water tastes good highlights the fact that a miracle in the face of hopelessness is more pleasurable than one good thing among many. As with the bread, Frodo resists the idea that Sam should put himself at risk, once again showing that he thinks of them as equals and doesn't regard Sam as a servant or as disposable in any way.



Sam's experience reflects the idea that one moment of sensory beauty can distract from many days of exhaustion and pain, at least temporarily. The star also emphasizes the vitality of nature and its triumph over manmade destruction—no matter how oppressive the shadow, there'll still be a star above it.



Frodo and Sam wake holding hands. They scramble up the rest of the brambly cliff to the innermost fence of Mordor. Mount Doom is still at least 40 miles away. The Eye of Mordor is “turned inward,” brooding on visions of a remade sword and the face of a king. Looking over the plains of Mordor, Frodo and Sam wonder how any army has survived such a lifeless place; yet they see camps of tents, some as big as towns and the closest one right below them at the foot of the cliff. Sam doubts they’ll be able to pass through these lands, but Frodo says that he never felt any hope that he’d finish the journey, and all they can do is go on.

It’s impossible to walk along the top of the cliff, so Frodo and Sam climb back down to the valley. Along the road, they duck out of sight of two approaching orcs. One appears to be a tracker and says to the other that he’s lost the scent he’s tracking and wants to go home. He and the other orc discuss their confusing instructions—they were meant to be looking for a huge elf, which was then described as a short dwarflike person and then a pair of Uruk-hai. They mention that the raiding of Cirith Ungol by this mysterious figure only adds to the fact that battle abroad is going badly. The tracker has heard that the Lord of the Nazgûl has been defeated, and in fact he hopes that’s true.

Frodo and Sam understand from the orcs’ conversation that they’ve seen Gollum in Mordor and that he’s wanted alive. Sam tells Frodo he knew that Gollum wasn’t dead; Frodo asks how he knows. Sam describes Gollum’s treachery and his own journey since fighting Shelob. Frodo presses Sam’s hand but says nothing. They move on in the darkness, stumbling through the valley. When a hint of light appears again, they hide and rest. Sam asks Frodo if he knows how far there is still to go. Frodo says that they need to go further from Mount Doom to find the best path, but he knows his burden will grow unbearably heavy and he will have to go very slowly. Sam sighs: they’re out of water and almost out of food. Frodo tells him he’ll try to go more quickly, and the two set off again.

The light grows clearer than they’ve seen it here before. Frodo and Sam look around them; it seems they’ve reached a dead end in the valley. Their only choice is to follow the main road. Sam says they might as well try their luck—it’d be no worse to be captured now than to wander around Mordor aimlessly. Frodo rests again while Sam goes out to find more water. The water source he finds seems dried up, but he holds out hope. Eventually he finds a tiny pool to fill his bottle. While there, he sees a creature slinking around the rocks. He recognizes it and longs to throttle it, but it disappears before he can reach it. When he returns to Frodo, he tells him he’s seen Gollum nearby. Sam goes to sleep while Frodo keeps watch.

Like Denethor, Sauron spends time mulling and attempting to predict the future—and given that the reader knows how this affected Denethor, it’s suggested Sauron might be tricked by the threat of his own predictions in a similar way. Mordor’s armies survive in a barren, uninviting wilderness, which shows that their existence is based on destruction and following orders, and completely bare of beauty or the joys of nature—an almost unthinkable existence for hobbits from the Shire.



The orcs’ conversation betrays their lack of morale. In the uncertainty that has arisen from mixed communication, they’re no longer motivated to follow directions and would rather just go home. It’s a sign that Sauron’s power is built not on respect and trust but on unquestioned authority, and that authority will turn into weakness when even a small part of his plan goes wrong. The orcs don’t even respect the most powerful of Sauron’s servants, so it’s clear that they feel no inherent loyalty to their comrades.



Frodo’s lack of a verbal response to Sam’s information about Gollum suggests that he may feel guilty about allowing Gollum to jeopardize Sam’s safety and Frodo and Sam’s friendship. But Frodo’s priorities lie completely in getting to Mount Doom before his strength runs out, so he doesn’t dwell on this. The two hobbits are working against impossible odds—the longer their path is, the more likely it is to be successful, but they’re running out of rations which makes their chance of success very slim anyway.



Frodo and Sam’s odds of success are so low that they’re better off walking directly into the path of danger. Though Frodo has been insistent about his equality with Sam, Sam still acts as his servant and protector and goes in search of water. Sam’s still enraged by Gollum’s treachery and betrayal, which fires up his desire to kill Gollum—a desire that goes against his other priorities of care and protection.



Frodo and Sam set off again. After 12 miles they hear marching feet behind them, too close to escape from by running ahead. They sit in the nook of a cliff with a dim hope of being passed unnoticed. Their plan seems to work until one of the chiefs sees them and tells them to get up—this is no time for resting. They get up and join the company of orcs, but Frodo finds it especially hard to keep up the pace. Just as Frodo and Sam become desperate, the road becomes busy with different troops, and they take the chance to crawl away off the road. Frodo lies in their hiding place as if dead.

Frodo and Sam get lucky—their orc clothes have disguised them well enough to pass as orc soldiers, but this also highlights that the orcs privilege haphazard urgency over careful, detailed decisions. Once again, the chaos of Mordor works in the hobbits' favor, allowing them to escape while the orc armies battle with their self-destructive tendencies.



BOOK 6, CHAPTER 3

Frodo and Sam sleep restlessly on the hard stones. In the morning, Sam looks around at the flat, lifeless land. Mount Doom is at least 50 miles away, and Sam realizes for the first time that even if their provisions last them that far, it'll be impossible to survive a return journey. Sam thinks of the Shire and of the people he loves there. He believes Gandalf to be dead after his fall in Moria, and thinks that, if Gandalf hadn't fallen, things would have turned out much better. Sam steels himself and goes to rouse Frodo, who is already awake.

In this moment, Sam realizes the true scale of his loss: not only are he and Frodo in acute physical danger, but the reality is that they have no way of making a return journey—they just don't have enough to eat or drink. But Sam is also disadvantaged by his lack of knowledge. Perhaps if he knew that Gandalf was alive, he'd find a way to hope for his and Frodo's survival.



Frodo is so exhausted after a few miles of picking out a path that he and Sam decide to take the easier but more visible main road. At this point, Aragorn's army has passed the crossroad. Frodo and Sam journey on for days, taking breaks to rest fitfully. Even more harrowing than their hunger and exhaustion is the threat they feel from Sauron, toward whom they are moving. On the fourth day after their escape from the orc company, Sam notices that Frodo has stopped speaking and has begun to raise his hand to shield his eyes as he walks, sometimes reaching towards his chest before he finds the strength to let his hand drop. They are at the point of turning towards Mount Doom, and Sam despairs at their diminishing supply of water—they could still be days away from the summit.

The hobbits' struggles compound: Frodo's inability to take the harder road due to his exhaustion leads to an increased risk of being found, captured, or killed on the main road. Sauron's power comes not only from the physical presence of his armies or even the symbols of fear and destruction, but his very essence himself which seems to leach out through the lands of Mordor. The Ring becomes more animated when it's closer to its master, and its temptation for Frodo increases as Frodo loses his sense of rational thought and succumbs more to his subconscious desires.



When Sam wakes Frodo again, Frodo tells him he has no strength to go on. Sam warily offers again to carry the **Ring**, at which Frodo moves to challenge him with his sword before catching himself. He tells Sam that there's no way he can give the Ring up now. Sam suggests instead that they leave some things behind—their orc armor is easy to part with, but Sam is saddened to let go of his cooking equipment. He asks Frodo if he can remember the rabbit he cooked, or the day they saw the oliphaunt. Frodo can't remember these things or anything else: he feels "naked in the dark." Sam throws his gear into a deep ravine and the sound of it clattering is like a death knell to him.

Unlike Frodo, who is slipping into utter exhaustion, Sam is still attached to the material objects that connect him with his identity and his desire to return home. This makes getting rid of his pots and pans—his only physical comforts—very difficult, as if he's finally giving up any hope of returning home. Further, Sam still has positive recollections of the journey so far. But Frodo is losing all sense of his identity, and even his senses are leaving him.



Frodo and Sam turn at last towards Mount Doom. They're no longer worried about hiding, only about moving forward. Frodo seems to have some new strength and they walk faster than expected, but soon it gets dark again. Frodo tells Sam he's thirsty; Sam gives him a mouthful of water. Only one more mouthful remains. While Frodo rests, Sam debates with himself the way forward. He thinks there's only one more day until they finish their journey, but he knows Frodo doesn't even have the strength for a day left. Still, he resolves to help Frodo finish his quest, even if he has to carry him up the mountain.

The next day, Frodo and Sam, exhausted and in excruciating pain, reach the foot of the mountain. As they approach, Frodo throws himself to the ground, and Sam sees that he's shivering. They no longer have a blanket, so Sam does his best to warm Frodo with his own body. After a while, as light filters down on them, Sam rouses Frodo once more and begins to carry him up the mountain. He's surprised to find that Frodo feels light on his back, either because he's so shrunken from his journey or because Sam has found some new strength. Halfway up the mountain it becomes easier to breathe above the smog of Mordor, and the mountain is not as tall as it looked on their approach. Sam holds onto a shred of hope that they'll reach the top alive.

Sam sees a path stretching up the mountain. Unknown to him, it's Sauron's road from his tower to the Chambers of Fire. Sam and Frodo crawl up the cliff "like small grey insects" to reach the path, where Frodo turns to look at the Eye in Sauron's tower. It's turned away from them towards the north, where Aragorn's army waits at the Black Gate. Looking towards the Eye makes Frodo reach towards the **Ring** on the chain around his neck, and Sam kneels down to hold his hands. He senses that they've been seen and must make their final struggle up the mountain.

The path is more treacherous than it first appeared. As Frodo and Sam turn a bend in the road, Sam is struck by a weight and finds Gollum has come to seize the **Ring** from Frodo. Sam draws his sword, but Frodo and Gollum are locked together and he can't strike. Gollum seems to have lost some of his strength, though, and Frodo shakes him off, telling him his time has come. Sam steps between them and tells Frodo to carry on up the path while he deals with Gollum. Sam has the chance to kill Gollum, but Gollum begs for mercy, and Sam knows—having now carried the Ring even just a short way—how wretched and despairing Gollum must be. Sam tells Gollum to flee, but Gollum, unseen by Sam, stops partway down the mountain and turns to slink up behind the hobbits again.

Frodo and Sam have given up on secrecy or stealth. Their only hope is to reach their destination before collapsing from exhaustion or succumbing to Sauron's power. Sam is still firmly committed to his task of helping Frodo, and even if he can't help him with his burden, he'll use the strength of his own body to finish the quest.



Sam's surprising show of strength suggests that in the event of great desperation, one small person might still have enough power to make a significant difference. Even as the hobbits get closer and closer to their perilous destination, hope begins to arrive in the form of light and clear air. It seems that the actual completion of their quest has been overshadowed by their exhaustion and fear—the physical demand is now possible to meet.



Sam will do anything to help Frodo achieve his quest, even if he's only able to use his physical body to keep Frodo from putting on the Ring. The description of the two of them as insects is a sign that Sauron hasn't thought much of their presence or might not have noticed them climbing the mountain at all, giving them the advantage of secrecy.



The fact that Gollum followed Frodo and Sam all the way through Mordor, despite his previous experience of torture in Barad-dûr, emphasizes his utter desperation to reclaim the Ring. He's no longer tempered by the innocence of Smeagol, the being he once was, and is now completely wracked by the Ring's temptation. Sam's firsthand experience of this temptation and his unwavering peaceful qualities lead to him showing Gollum mercy, even though he knows that killing him would've been both logical and safe.



Sam climbs on up the path and comes to a door in the side of the mountain. He calls for Frodo but hears no answer. He then tries to use Galadriel's phial, but its light is no match for the oppressive darkness at the heart of Sauron's dominion. He sees flashes of red before him and understands that he's walked into the fiery heart of the mountain. Ahead of him he sees Frodo standing at the edge of the chasm. Frodo turns to him and speaks in a strange, powerful voice. He says he will not carry out the quest—the **Ring** belongs to him. Frodo puts the Ring on his finger and vanishes.

In the same moment, many things happen. Sam is knocked over from behind and hits his head on the floor. He blacks out momentarily as a dark shape leaps over him. When Frodo puts on the **Ring**, he draws Sauron's attention, and Sauron at once understands Aragorn's intention was only to distract him. Sauron's armies all falter: his mind has abandoned all battle plans and is now entirely focused on the Ring. He summons the Black Riders to make their way to Mount Doom. Sam regains consciousness and sees Gollum at the edge of the chasm fighting an invisible figure.

Gollum bites down on something with his fangs. Frodo becomes visible again, and Gollum holds the **Ring**, still with Frodo's finger inside it. He dances with mindless joy and topples off the ledge into the fire below. There's a huge cacophony; the mountain begins to shake. Sam picks Frodo up and carries him out of the mountain to a scene of massive destruction. The mountains and towers of Mordor are crumbling, black rain is falling, and the Nazgûl, flying into the storm, are destroyed in the fiery ruins.

Frodo says to Sam that this is the end. He's totally spent, but his burden has been lifted and he's regained the spirit he had when he lived in the Shire. Though they seem to have reached the end of their story, Sam is overcome with joy to see Frodo become himself again. He's glad to know that Gollum is gone forever, but Frodo says that Gandalf was right: Gollum did have a part to play in the story, and without him, Frodo could never have let the Ring go. He adds that he's happy Sam is here with him at the end.

Frodo seems to have been completely transformed by the Ring, succumbing to its power at the very last moment of his quest. Sauron's power at the heart of the mountain is indeed too strong for even Galadriel's phial to pierce, and it seems that the hobbits have finally come up against the impossible. It's this hopelessness that perhaps encourages Frodo to give in to the Ring's temptation.



This moment demonstrates that, despite his complex orchestrations and huge power in battle, Sauron's chief priority is to sustain his power and maintain his claim over the Ring. As soon as his attention turns away from the battle, his troops lose their strength and cohesion, demonstrating their lack of individual loyalty or motivation—they're only holding together because of Sauron's will.



Lust for the Ring has transformed Gollum into a being more animal than person, using even his teeth to struggle for the item he desires. This relentless greed is ultimately the downfall of both Gollum and Sauron—they're killed by their single-minded focus on this sole item which has distracted them from the danger that surrounds them.



Even though they're presumably about to die, Frodo can experience some joy at the end of his quest because he's regained his sense of self, with which comes freedom and the experience of pleasure. Sam's companionship is profoundly precious to Frodo, who, thanks to Sam, will not die alone.



BOOK 6, CHAPTER 4

Aragorn's army is overcome by the onslaught of Mordor's troops. Suddenly, though, Gandalf looks to the north and cries, "The Eagles are coming!" As the huge eagles arrive in long lines, the Nazgûl are called away and Mordor's army seems to slacken, filled with dread. Aragorn and the other captains rally their troops again, buoyed by new hope, but Gandalf calls for them to stand and wait. Around them, the land of Mordor begins to crumble. A huge **shadow** billows out towards them before disintegrating in the wind. Gandalf tells them that Sauron has been defeated and his reign has ended.

When the captains look around them, they see that the enemy troops are fleeing in chaos. Gandalf calls to the mightiest eagle and asks to be carried by him, joined by a few other eagles, towards Mount Doom. Meanwhile, Sam encourages Frodo to walk just a little further down the mountain with him, but soon the mountain erupts with lava and ash. Soon they'll be engulfed. Sam thinks about their incredible story and wishes he could live to hear it told by others. Just as Frodo and Sam fall down, exhausted and soon to die, Gandalf and the eagles find them and lift their bodies to safety.

Sam wakes up on a soft bed as if from a long dream. Frodo is lying beside him, and when Sam sees that Frodo is missing a finger, he realizes that it wasn't all a dream. Gandalf appears in front of the bed. Sam is amazed: he thought Gandalf was dead, and he asks if all sad things are going to be erased. Gandalf laughs, and the sound makes Sam burst into tears, overwhelmed with joy. Frodo wakes up next to him. Gandalf tells them both that they're in the realm of Gondor and the king is waiting to see them. Sam worries about what he'll wear, but Gandalf says that the rags they wore on their journey are the most noble and appropriate clothes.

Frodo and Sam follow Gandalf through a tree-lined grove and are heralded by a host of knights and guards. The crowd raises spears and blows trumpets and chants in praise of the hobbits. As they go forward, they see Aragorn sitting on a high seat: he is the king they were told about. Aragorn stoops to bow for Frodo and Sam, then leads them to sit on the throne. A minstrel offers a song of their journey, at which Sam feels his dreams have come true. After this celebration of the hobbits, the crowd rises to feast together.

The arrival of Gandalf's eagles shows that even when he thinks he's exhausted every option, the loyalty and power he commands in Middle-earth provide him with new sources of hope. The image of Sauron's shadow reaching out before disappearing is a sign that his greed was never able to produce a lasting or tangible kind of power—with the destruction of the Ring, he, too, fades into nothing.



Though Sam doubted that the others thought of him and Frodo during their time in Mordor, Gandalf's first act in the event of Sauron's destruction is to rescue the two hobbits, showing his priority was to ensure their safety in any way he could. And even in the face of death, Sam keeps hoping for the future of other hobbits and that they'll remember him and Frodo in their stories.



Gandalf's presence when Sam wakes up seems like a miracle—he's so confused by what was a dream and what was real that he imagines Gandalf's presence will make everything good again. Sam's overwhelming emotions, which arise from hearing Gandalf laugh, shows that he hasn't heard a sound that joyful in weeks—he's had to sustain his and Frodo's hopes without the help of any tangible delight.



Much has changed in Frodo and Sam's absence—the man they knew as Strider, the leader of their small Fellowship, is now Gondor's king. And their doubts that anyone remembered them during their journey through Mordor are now disproved by the lavish celebrations in their honor. Sam, whose dream was to be immortalized in song, is now completely satisfied.



Frodo and Sam are led to a tent where they're given noble armor to wear, including, to their delight, the mithril-mail that was stolen from Frodo in Mordor. Though Frodo gave Sting to Sam on their journey, Sam insists that Frodo wear it again. Gandalf helps them to dress in their mail and places a silver circlet on each of their heads. They arrive at the feast and sit at the king's table along with Gimli and Legolas. When two esquires come to serve wine, they recognize them as Merry and Pippin. After the feast, the hobbits talk with Gandalf, Legolas, and Gimli about their different journeys. There's so much to make sense of that Pippin suggests Frodo will need to be locked up and forced to write it all down, otherwise Bilbo would be very disappointed. The friends disperse to rest.

The mithril-mail and Sting are signs of the free people's complete victory over Mordor, proven by their ability to reclaim some of what was lost without agreeing to Sauron's terms. Frodo and Sam are treated like royalty, demonstrating Aragorn's respect for bravery and sacrifice over any official rank or status, and proving to them that their treacherous quest was vital to Middle-earth's freedom and survival. But Pippin, like Sam, feels that a journey isn't complete without being properly remembered, so he thinks it's vitally important for Frodo to record every detail.



The camp remains in Ithilien for a few days. The hobbits wander the land, recognizing places they passed through on their journeys, while the men prepare for the return to Minas Tirith. Eventually, they all set out to the city and camp on the field below.

The hobbits are able to find familiarity in Ithilien, which is a sign that their travels have taken them far from the Shire and they've been able to adapt to new places and landscapes.



BOOK 6, CHAPTER 5

After the departure of Aragorn's army, those remaining in Minas Tirith are filled with gloom. Éowyn refuses to rest for the amount of time the healers think is required. She rises, saying she'll get sicker if she can't find anything to do. She asks for tidings of war but there are none. She's frustrated by the healers who suggest that there are other things outside of war that require attention, and she says that she would've rather died on the battlefield than be stuck here with nothing to do. She demands to be taken to Faramir, who is still resting in the Houses of Healing.

Even after nearly martyring herself on the battlefield, Éowyn is not satisfied and feels just as restricted as she did before. She cannot even surrender to a few days of rest without feeling condemned to a life of helplessness, and she can't see the value of tasks outside the most dangerous and vengeful ones. Her demand to see Faramir suggests she thinks a man of high status will understand her dilemma and let her go free from the Houses of Healing.



Faramir is walking in the garden when Éowyn finds him. She explains that she's not upset with her treatment, but she cannot endure being caged. When Faramir sees her, he's moved by her beauty and obvious strength, and asks what she wants. When she demands to be let go from the Houses of Healing, she begins to doubt herself; she doesn't want Faramir to think she's just being petulant. He tells her that he himself is under the care of the healers, and even if he had the power to release Éowyn, he wouldn't, because she still needs care. Éowyn softens and begins to cry. One of the causes of her sadness is that the window by her bed doesn't look to the east. Faramir tells her he can fix this, at least.

Faramir's openness to hearing Éowyn's wishes, and his subsequent refusal to grant her freedom from the Houses of Healing, suggest that he respects her and is invested in her happiness, while believing that she should be cared for and protected. He can sense that she may not appreciate being treated gently or cared for, but he does not allow her to reject the treatment she needs, suggesting he loves her more than she can immediately appreciate.



Faramir goes on to tell Éowyn that he'd enjoy her company during his walks in the garden. She isn't sure what he wants with her company and doesn't have much interest in conversation. Faramir tells her he thinks she is beautiful, and he feels close to her through their shared experience of the Dark **Shadow**. Éowyn tells him she is still under the shadow, so Faramir should not depend on her to lighten his spirits, but thanks him for the permission to walk in the gardens. When Faramir returns inside, he asks the warden to tell him everything he knows about Éowyn, but the warden tells him that Merry would be able to provide more insight. Merry helps Faramir to understand Éowyn's sadness, but when Faramir walks in the garden again, Éowyn doesn't join him.

In the morning, Faramir sees Éowyn again. They walk and talk together, seeming to grow stronger in each other's company. A few days pass and the two of them look out from the wall together. The air has grown colder. Aragorn must be reaching the Black Gate soon. Faramir tells Éowyn that the last days have brought him both joy and pain: joy in meeting Éowyn, but increased sadness and fear of losing the war, because he does not want to lose her. Éowyn evades his statement. From the wall, they see a huge mountain of darkness rising in the distance and feel the city shake. Faramir says that he knows that this seems like the end, but he feels an unreasonable amount of hope and tells Éowyn he thinks that the darkness is over. Without knowing it, Éowyn and Faramir have been holding hands.

Suddenly, the huge **shadow** disperses and the sun shines on the river. An eagle arrives with the news that Sauron has been overthrown, and the people of the city sing in all their different languages. Faramir takes up his position as Steward of Gondor until the king's return to take charge of readying the city. Though Éomer summons Éowyn to join the camp in Ithilien, she doesn't go, and while she stays in the city, she seems to grow weaker and sadder.

Faramir asks Éowyn why she refused to go to Éomer. He suggests there are two reasons: first, that it was Éomer and not Aragorn that called for her; second, that she wishes to stay with Faramir. Faramir knows that Éowyn wished to have her love for Aragorn requited, but he suggests that she only loved him because he represented an ascent to power and an escape from her own life. Faramir tells Éowyn he loves her, not out of pity, which was the only way Aragorn could love her; but because he sees her beauty and strength. At this, Éowyn's heart changes. She vows to become a healer rather than obsessing over battle and honor. Faramir and Éowyn agree to marry.

Éowyn's stubbornness continues to shine through even, or perhaps especially, when she's shown gentleness and understanding. She has restricted her appreciation of her own worth to her value on the battlefield, which means she's confused when Faramir professes to find her beautiful and requests her companionship—these are not qualities she has considered useful. Merry's ability to tell Faramir about Éowyn suggests he's cultivated a special friendship with her—a friendship that, perhaps, was strengthened by their shared status as outsiders in the midst of the Rohirrim.



Faramir and Éowyn grow stronger from their budding relationship, suggesting that love and care have physical, not just mental and emotional, benefits. Love in a time of war, Faramir realizes, is especially joyful and especially painful—joyful because it's one of the only delights in such a dark time, and painful because the war's hopelessness means there's little chance that he'll get to live a happy life with Éowyn. This passage also displays Faramir's ability to look for hope and possibility, which acts as a foil for Éowyn's stern, realistic outlook.



Faramir's assumption of the role of Steward shows that he's loyal and humble in equal measure: he's devoted to his city and to making it ready for Aragorn, and yet he knows that his role as steward will be short-lived. The news of peace brings back feelings of despair for Éowyn, who knows she can no longer search for her purpose in the violence of war.



In this moment, Éowyn's path seems to become clear to her. She stops yearning for Aragorn's love, which she's realized he'll never give to her, and she surrenders to Faramir's gentleness, no longer stubbornly refusing the love he feels for the qualities she herself couldn't value. She appears to realize the values of softness and care, finding peace in the idea of protecting and healing instead of fighting, killing, and dying.



The people of the city prepare for the king's return. Many groups of men arrive from distant cities, and the women and children return home. At last, the people of the city see a camp arrive in the field below. The next morning, the captains ride towards the city where Faramir greets them. Aragorn leads the company of Dúnedain forward, and with them are Éomer, Gandalf, Imrahil, and the four hobbits. Faramir meets them and surrenders his stewardship to Aragorn, but Aragorn tells him the office of steward will remain with Faramir. Then, Faramir announces to the people of Gondor that Aragorn has come to claim the kingship.

Faramir brings Aragorn the crown of the last king. Aragorn gives the crown back to Faramir, saying that he has had the help of many in order to claim the kingship, so he'd like Frodo to bring him the crown and Gandalf to set it on his head. When this has been done, Aragorn rises: he appears to the crowd like one of the ancient kings, wise, strong, and gentle. Aragorn takes the throne and begins to transform Minas Tirith into a more beautiful place than it has ever been.

Over the following days, Aragorn issues pardons and judgments. He makes peace with the men from the south and east who fought under Sauron's rule, and he releases the slaves of Mordor. He then comes to Beregon's sentence. Because Beregon disobeyed his orders, he would have once been sentenced to death, but instead Aragorn appoints him to Faramir's guard as a captain. Aragorn gives Ithilien to Faramir's command. Éomer returns to Rohan to set things in order, and Éowyn goes with him, telling Faramir she'll return when they've laid Théoden to rest. The Riders of Rohan leave Minas Tirith.

The people of the city are busy repairing the damage from battle. The hobbits, Legolas, and Gimli stay with Aragorn, who doesn't want the Fellowship to disband yet. He tells them a day is approaching that he's been anticipating for many years, though he won't say what that day is. Frodo knows that the hobbits will have to return to the Shire soon. Gandalf assures him that, while their journey must've felt endless, it has in fact been less than a year since they left the Shire.

One night, Gandalf takes Aragorn to a high peak to survey the land of Gondor. He tells Aragorn that while much of the kingdom has been preserved, there will be a lot that will soon decay. With the destruction of the One **Ring**, the Three Rings also lost their power. It is now up to the mortal men to ensure the preservation of their lands and people. Gandalf goes on to say that he will not stay for long, now—his task was to be Sauron's enemy, and that task is over.

Aragorn's ascent to the throne will unite the many different groups of men from all over Gondor, and it will also provide a chance for celebration—something Gondor has presumably gone without for many years. He begins his reign by honoring the different peoples who aided Gondor in the war, highlighting his humility and loyalty to the ones he loves. This loyalty continues when he tells Faramir he'll remain a steward instead of surrendering his status.



Even in the most symbolic matters like the placing of the crown on his head, it's important for Aragorn to honor the people closest to him who have sacrificed so much for his kingdom. He's a symbol of the power that comes from a combination of strength and gentleness, and his wisdom manifests in the priority to beautify the city for the joy of all who live there.



Aragorn, like Gandalf, values the individual sacrifice of a well-meaning person over a group's commitment to blindly following authority, which is why he grants Beregon the honor of captain. Meanwhile, Éowyn's enduring love and loyalty to her home and her family mean she prioritizes helping Éomer to set matters straight in Rohan and burying Théoden over spending time with her betrothed.



Though he's preoccupied with his role as king, Aragorn's love for his friends never diminishes, and he keeps them close as long as he can. He knows he needs their loyalty and comfort as he anticipates an important, long-awaited day. Meanwhile, regardless of how Frodo has been changed by his journey, his thoughts are still with the Shire: he knows that it's where he and his fellow hobbits truly belong.



Gandalf's advice to Aragorn suggests that he'll need to be prepared to take responsibility for the world of men in the absence of immortal beings—a heavy burden for Aragorn, who has only just accepted his role as Gondor's king.



Aragorn laments that he cannot see his line continuing, and one day he will die—who will be king after him? Gandalf tells him to look around him. Aragorn sees a sapling growing in the snow: it's a **White Tree** that must've been planted from the fruit of the tree in Minas Tirith's court. Aragorn lifts the tree easily from the soil and carries it back to the citadel where he replaces the old, withered tree with the young, healthy one. He says that "the sign has been given" and the day he spoke of will arrive soon. He sets watchmen on the walls.

Messengers come to Aragorn on the day before Midsummer to tell him that a group of Elves are riding towards the city. Aragorn orders the city be made ready. The Elves arrive, headed by Elladan and Elrohir and joined by others including Galadriel and Elrond. Beside Elrond is Arwen. Frodo exclaims that she, the "Evenstar," has come to make the day as beautiful as the night. Aragorn welcomes the Elves. Elrond gives Arwen's hand to Aragorn, and after they climb the levels of the city, Aragorn and Arwen are married.

BOOK 6, CHAPTER 6

Many days later, Frodo goes to Aragorn to ask for permission to leave the city. Before returning to the Shire, he wants to visit Bilbo in Rivendell. He was disappointed that Bilbo didn't make the journey to Minas Tirith with the Elves. Arwen tells him that Bilbo is very weak now that the power of the **Ring** has been destroyed, and he only has one long journey left in him. Aragorn tells Frodo that he'll ride with him and the other hobbits as far as Rohan and offers him any gift he desires—but Arwen chooses the gift: her place on the ship to the Undying Lands if he chooses to leave Middle-earth with Bilbo.

The hobbits ride with Éomer's company to escort Théoden back to Rohan. When they arrive, they stay and rest. After a great feast, Théoden is buried beneath a mound like the line of kings before him. The group prepares to ride again, but Arwen stays behind at Edoras. Her final parting with Elrond is incredibly painful: they will never see each other again. Éowyn gives Merry an ancient horn as a token of his service to Rohan. The group rides on to Helm's Deep where Legolas fulfils his promise to Gimli and goes with him into the Glittering Caves. Legolas finds them beautiful beyond description.

The White Tree growing in the rubble and snow is a sign that Aragorn himself, though uncertain and from a line of fallen kings, will be able to lift Gondor into a place of flourishing glory again. Planting the new tree, a symbol for hope and the future, suggests that the day Aragorn is waiting for is coming soon.



Arwen's beauty brings great joy to those around her and is a sign that her presence in Gondor will lead to delight and a flourishing kingdom. The marriage between Aragorn and Arwen is also a symbol of the Elves' respect for him, and their trust that together, he and Arwen will ensure the virtue and beauty of Middle-earth.



Even though Frodo has endured the treachery of Mordor and almost sacrificed his life for the freedom of Middle-earth, he still asks Aragorn for permission to come and go from Minas Tirith, which is a sign of his loyalty and respect for the new king. That huge sacrifice doesn't go unrewarded, though—Arwen's sacrifice is just as great, because giving up her place on the ship is a guarantee that she'll live out the last days of her life in Middle-earth and never see her fellow Elves again.



Éowyn's gift to Merry of the horn is a sign of both of their true natures—Éowyn as someone with an affinity for battle and who is roused by a rallying horn, and Merry as someone who's learned much about war and might end up needing that knowledge and its accompanying tool in the future. Legolas's appreciation of the Glittering Caves is a sign that his friendship with Gimli has been transformative, and now he finds places outside of Mirkwood to be just as profoundly beautiful as his own home.



The group rides on to Isengard and talks with the Ents who have taken over Orthanc. Gandalf thanks Tree-beard for all his help in the war. Tree-beard tells him he's been boring Saruman, who had been trapped in the tower, with his stories, but that Saruman fled a week ago. This worries Gandalf, who suspects Saruman has a little more strength left. The party prepares to move on, but Legolas and Gimli decide to take a different route to reach their own homelands. Aragorn announces the end of the Fellowship of the Ring at last. Galadriel tells Tree-beard that they won't meet again, at least not while Middle-earth exists.

The hobbits are sad to leave Aragorn. Aragorn reminds Pippin that he's still a knight of Gondor and might be called to serve again. The hobbits ride with Gandalf, Galadriel, and Celeborn. On their way, they come across Saruman, who looks ragged and old. Gandalf offers to help him, but Saruman refuses the offer. He laughs at Galadriel and Gandalf, telling them they've brought their own doom in their victory over Sauron. Merry offers Saruman a pipe of Longbottom Leaf, which Saruman claims to be his anyway. When he curses Merry, Merry asks for the pipe and leaf back. Saruman hints at the hobbits' home not being as safe when they return as when they left it. Gandalf thinks Saruman might be planning something wicked.

The hobbits feel they should head back to the Shire quickly, but Frodo insists he needs to visit Bilbo in Rivendell first. After a few more days, they camp for a while so that Galadriel and Celeborn can take their time conversing with Elrond and Gandalf about the past and the future. Eventually, Galadriel and Celeborn head into the mountains with the others from Lórien while the hobbits continue to Rivendell with Elrond and Gandalf. When they reach Rivendell, they find Bilbo immediately: he looks old but peaceful. He reminds them it's his birthday tomorrow; he'll be 129 years old. The hobbits celebrate Bilbo's birthday with him and stay in Rivendell for a few more days, recounting their journeys to Bilbo, though he struggles to stay awake through the stories.

The hobbits eventually prepare to leave for the Shire. Gandalf will escort them as far as Bree. Frodo says goodbye to Bilbo, who tells him he's getting very sleepy. Bilbo gives gifts to the four hobbits and asks Frodo where his **ring** ended up. Frodo tells him he lost it, but Bilbo wishes he could see it again. When Bilbo has fallen asleep, Sam tells Frodo that he doubts Bilbo will write their story. Bilbo wakes to say that he'd like Frodo to take his books and papers and arrange them into more of an order. On the day the hobbits leave, Elrond tells Frodo in private that he won't have any need to return to Rivendell to see Bilbo—he should look out for Bilbo and Elrond in the Shire at this time of year.

This is a scene of many farewells and endings, and to most of the characters, it seems that the journey is coming to a close. Gandalf has his doubts, though, and as the person best equipped with knowledge of Saruman's character, his concern is a sign that not everything will be totally peaceful and settled yet.



Saruman's greed and pride are still a huge part of his character, even in seemingly utter defeat. The Longbottom Leaf, offered as a gift by Merry, was a product of the Shire anyway, and Saruman scorns it in a pure display of arrogance. His anticipation of Saruman and Galadriel's demise now that their rings have lost power is similar to Denethor's despair when he assumed he could predict the future: Saruman has no true knowledge of what awaits him or his other immortal companions, and his presumptions come from a place of insecurity rather than objective truth.



Frodo's stubborn resolve to visit Bilbo despite the hobbits' collective worry about what might've happened in the Shire shows that his love and care for Bilbo have endured despite his perilous journey. Bilbo's aged appearance is a sign that his vitality was tied to the Ring—even though, unlike Gollum, he gave the Ring up freely, he is still dependent on it to a lesser degree. His weakness is all the more apparent when he falls asleep during stories, because even just a few years ago, stories were a large source of his delight.



Though Bilbo is no longer able to finish writing his story, it's clear that the memories are still important to him because he entrusts his notes to Frodo to compile into a complete book. Elrond's private conversation with Frodo shows that the two of them have a special relationship that can't be understood or appreciated by the other hobbits, hinting at the fact that Bilbo and Elrond will be going on a particularly special journey when they venture through the Shire—a journey Frodo will understand the significance of, but the others won't.



BOOK 6, CHAPTER 7

As the hobbits ride towards the Shire, Frodo feels the pain of his wound more strongly. It's been a year since he was stabbed by a Black Rider. He's worried his wound will never heal, and that he won't recover from the burden of the **Ring**. He asks Gandalf where he'll be able to rest at last, but Gandalf doesn't answer. The next day, Frodo feels better and the journey seems to go quickly. The group reaches Weathertop and Frodo begs them to hurry past while he refuses to look at it.

They reach Bree where they're disappointed by the gatekeeper's brusque welcome. The innkeeper of the Prancing Pony, Butterbur, greets them warmly but tells them that most rooms of the inn are empty these days, and they'll find out why soon. No more than a few people are in the common room. Butterbur tells them there's no pipe-weed to spare—they don't get any supply from the Shire these days. He goes on to tell them that last year a group of "bad men" came through Bree and some of the villagers were killed. The hobbits thought they'd left danger behind them, but Butterbur says the only reason they got past the gates of Bree so easily was because the men were threatened by their armor and weapons. The hobbits realize their appearance has changed dramatically since they left the Shire.

Gandalf tells Butterbur to cheer up: more pleasant days will come soon. He says that many people will come to the area to settle and live, and that even the king will visit. Butterbur doesn't understand what the king has to do with Bree. Sam tells Butterbur that the king is the same Strider that visited Bree a year ago. Butterbur is shocked and pleased. He tells Sam that Bill, the pony the hobbits took from Bree when they set out, returned by himself. Sam goes to visit Bill at once.

The Prancing Pony is soon filled with visitors curious about the returned travelers. They ask Frodo whether he's written his book yet; he replies that he's going to finish it when he gets home. After a few nights, the hobbits and Gandalf leave Bree. Butterbur says he should've warned them more about what's gone on in the Shire. The hobbits wonder what he's talking about and become more worried when Gandalf tells them he won't go with them to the Shire. He says that it's up to the hobbits to settle the problems themselves.

The fact that the pain returns to Frodo on the day that marks a year since he was wounded implies that the pain he feels is as much a symbolic sense of grief as it is a physical injury. This pairs with his refusal to acknowledge Weathertop when the group passes by—the memory is deeply uncomfortable for him.



Bree's transformation into something of a ghost town is worrying for the hobbits, who, when they were there last, drank and shared stories in the rowdy inn. There's no pipe-weed and the atmosphere is decidedly somber, which comes as a shock—the hobbits thought they were returning to a home that was untouched by the perils they experienced. They realize that they've transformed on their journey, as shown by their new outfits, and this hints at the fact that perhaps their home has undergone its own transformation.



In this moment, Butterbur realizes that his thoughts of Gondor as an irrelevant, far-off place are perhaps mistaken, because the ranger who frequented his inn is now the king. He realizes that he's not so far removed from the noble city of Minas Tirith, no matter how different he thinks hobbits are from kings.



The hobbits' hope of returning home to a peaceful, unchanged Shire begins to fade. It seems they have another challenge to face. Gandalf seems secure in the knowledge that the hobbits are up to the challenge, though, because he goes off on his own journey.



Gandalf urges the hobbits to hurry to the Shire before the gates are locked. Merry reminds him there aren't any gates—but Gandalf replies that they might not find that to be true anymore. As the four hobbits make their way home, Merry says it feels like they're waking up from a dream, but Frodo says it feels to him more like he's sinking back into one.

The suggestion that the Shire has locked gates is absurd to Merry, because he's never known the Shire to have any gates at all. Meanwhile, Frodo feels that the closer he gets to home, the more unreal his life begins to feel, which suggests his journey was more vivid than anything he experienced in the Shire, and he knows he'll never have similar experiences again.



BOOK 6, CHAPTER 8

When the four hobbits reach the Brandywine Bridge, they find a barred gate. They call for someone to let them in. A group of hobbits approaches the gate on the other side and seems scared of the four travelers, not recognizing them at first through their battle garb. Even when they greet the travelers as friends, however, they still won't let them through the gate, saying that they're following the orders of the Chief at Bag End. Frodo asks him if the Chief is Lotho, his unpopular relative, and the hobbits confirm this. Merry and Pippin climb the gate and have the gatekeeper unlock it, threatening him with their swords. Frodo and Sam pass through after them.

It's clear as soon as the four hobbits reach the Shire that things have fundamentally changed in the place they knew as their home. The hobbits in the Shire seem to be under the rule of the Chief rather than following the common hobbit sense that would allow them to open the gate to their friends—indeed, the very presence of the gate suggests the Shire has become a place of fear and control rather than peaceful freedom.



Merry asks for the group to be put up at the guardhouse, but Hob, one of the hobbits from the gate, says it's no longer allowed to take guests in and share extra food. Pippin, exhausted, says they'll eat the food they're carrying, and Hob lets them in reluctantly. On the walls of the house there are lists of rules, which Pippin tears down. Hob tells them the only people allowed pipe-weed these days are Lotho's ruffians, and that the rest has been taken away out of the Shire. Sam tells everyone to calm down and rest until the morning.

The new rules set by the Chief seem completely at odds with the ways of life of hobbits, who are accustomed to sharing their food, acting hospitably, and enjoying homely pleasures. Despite his time spent far from the Shire, Pippin holds fast to these integral hobbit traits with a stubbornness that leads him to tear down the signs.



In the morning, the four hobbits set out towards Hobbiton in a hurry. There seem to be fires lit everywhere, sending up clouds of smoke. The hobbits approach an inn where they plan to stay, but they're met by a band of guards who list the many rules they've broken in the past day. Sam insults the guards further. The guards tell the travelers they're taking them to the Chief's men. Frodo laughs, saying that he'll go where he wants. He happens to be going to Bag End anyway, which the Chief is occupying. The head guard tells Frodo not to forget that he's arrested him.

Sam and Frodo aren't easily cowed by the hobbit guards' warnings, showing both that they are unaccustomed to being treated poorly in their own home, and that they've grown bolder and braver over the course of their journey—the idea of the Chief doesn't bring them much fear. The guards' authority is hollow and laughable because it suits the Shire so little.



Sam recognizes one of the guards and takes him aside. He tells the guard—Robin Smallburrow—that he should have more sense than to follow the Chief’s orders. Robin replies that the guards aren’t allowed to leave the Chief’s service. When Sam gets angry, Robin suggests that if more of the hobbits joined together in their anger, they could do something about the Chief and his rules. The four hobbits stay that night in the miserable guardhouse and set off again with a small band of guards in the morning. Though the guards believe Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin to be their prisoners, the four hobbits make the guards walk in front of them as they ride, talking and laughing. After a while, the guards give up: the pace is too quick for their legs and they’re hungry.

As the four hobbits journey on, they begin to see the damage done to the Shire. Some of the houses they knew have been burnt down and some streets are deserted. They look for someone to let them in on what’s been happening. A group of ruffians walks into the road to block their path and tells the hobbits they’re not allowed to go any further. At the ruffians’ taunting, Pippin unsheathes his sword and threatens them as a messenger of the king. The ruffians flee. Frodo says they may have come back too late to save Lotho, which confuses Pippin—surely they should destroy Lotho, not save him? Frodo explains that Lotho has been used as a puppet by the ruffians and is essentially a prisoner in Bag End.

When Pippin suggests that this will end in fighting, Frodo emphasizes that no hobbit is to be killed. Hobbits have never killed anyone on purpose in the Shire and they shouldn’t start now. In any case, the four of them are in danger and have no place to hide. Merry urges the others to gather all the people they can at once: they’re going to fight tonight. Sam goes to the Cottons’ farm to gather his friends. While there, he makes sure the farmer’s wife and daughter are safe. Rosie, the daughter, is the girl Sam thought of whenever he remembered home. Now she tells Sam to hurry back to help Frodo, but she runs back out to add that he looks “fine.”

When Sam returns, he finds more than a hundred hobbits have gathered with weapons. They’ve lit a fire, partly because it breaks one of the Chief’s rules. When the guards come to see what’s happening, most of them join the group of rebel hobbits. Frodo tries to assess how many ruffians they’ll have to take on and how deadly their weapons are. Pippin learns that it was in fact his own father, and not the ruffians, who cast the first shot. He rides off to his part of the Shire to gather a band of his relatives.

Robin and Sam’s conversation reveals that the hobbits who are following the Chief aren’t doing so out of great feelings of loyalty or devotion, but because they haven’t had the right opportunity to stand up as an organized group. This bears some similarity to the armies of orcs in Mordor, which suggests that, like the orcs, the hobbits who serve the Chief will easily scatter and declare other loyalties when the opportunity presents itself.



Though the hobbits have mostly disregarded the Chief and treated his rules as jokes, the destruction he and his ruffians have caused to the Shire causes them real pain. This seems to spur Pippin on, and he uses his newfound armor to assume the status of a warrior. This is a sign that his travels have changed him—he’s no longer just a hobbit from the Shire, but a Knight of Gondor, too, and when that second status benefits him, he’ll call on its advantages.



Despite his extreme experiences in the darkest place in Middle-earth, Frodo is stubbornly gentle. His refusal to accept that anyone should be killed displays his true nature as a gentle and peace-loving hobbit—it’s just a coincidence that he was called on to undertake the impossible quest to destroy the Ring. But it also shows that he’s learned the value of mercy through his experience with Gollum, and he values the power he has to keep a life from ending unnecessarily.



Though the hobbits are seriously prepared to fight, their fire-lighting behavior suggests they’re also feeling a little cheeky and not fully appreciating the danger that might await them in the form of the Chief and his ruffians. Pippin’s father having shot the first arrow suggests that there are some hobbits in the Shire with the courage to fight on their own—just not that many of them.



Frodo repeats that he doesn't wish anyone to die. Merry tells him he has a plan. Some hobbits arrive from Hobbiton to say that the ruffians are coming and more will arrive from elsewhere. Merry lays his plan. The hobbits stand aside to let the ruffians pass, but follow after them quietly. Farmer Cotton stands ahead, challenging the men, and soon the other hobbits swarm them with weapons. Merry tells the men to lay down their weapons, but the leader decides to fight. He falls quickly, shot with arrows, and the other men surrender.

The hobbits take the men and tie them up. Farmer Cotton says he knew that the hobbits could rise up, but that they needed to be marshalled by a leader: it's good that Merry came back. Merry says there's much more to do before they have a victory. The next thing to do will be to call on the Chief in the morning. Farmer Cotton tells Sam that his father's house was burnt down; he's been moved to a newly built house and, while he's not exactly happy, he's safe. Sam asks to see him, worried that the Chief will order something terrible be done to him in the night.

That night, Frodo and Merry go with Farmer Cotton back to his farm, where he tells them what happened in the Shire since they left. As soon as Frodo left, Lotho—who the Cottons call Pimple—began to get greedier, buying more and more property, though his funding was never explained. He sold and sent off most of the Shire's produce including pipe-weed, which caused restlessness when the winter came and the Shire was left without. Then the ruffians arrived and started to cut down trees and build whatever they liked. The mayor tried to get to Bag End to complain, but he was taken and locked up before he could get there. Farmer Cotton says that Sharkey's arrival was the worst development of the whole thing so far.

Merry asks who Sharkey is. Cotton says he's the most wicked of all the ruffians and orders the rest of them only to burn and ruin what's around them. There hasn't been silence or peace since Sharkey arrived. The burning and destruction have begun to pollute the Brandywine River. Cotton suggests that Sharkey, not Lotho, is really in power. Sam arrives at the farmhouse with his father, who accuses Frodo of having caused the demise of the Shire by selling Bag-End before leaving. Frodo says he'll do his best to make up for it.

Merry's strategy proves that his time spent among the Rohirrim in battle provided him with some knowledge of battle strategy. His strategy, in fact, is quite similar to that of the Rohirrim at Minas Tirith, surrounding the enemy and then stealthily following from behind. He's willing to show mercy, but also unafraid to demonstrate the strength of his army.



It appears that the four hobbits arrived home at a vital moment, and it's their particular strengths that are able to muster the Shire's army. This might suggest that the Shire needed some of its inhabitants to go abroad and see the world in order to see and be driven to protect the Shire's especially precious qualities. Now that the four hobbits have seen places of utter ruin, their desire to protect their bucolic home has flourished.



Though the Chief has had the hobbits of the Shire under his control for some time, it's clear that his command is far from fearsome. Many of the hobbits still call him Pimple, the irreverent name they used for him before he became the Chief. However, it seems that the man called Sharkey is the true source of many hobbits' fear. The mayor's attempt to protect Hobbiton is a sign that he showed surprising courage, given that the role of mayor in Hobbiton is usually defined by attending parties and presiding over celebrations.



Sharkey's taste for destruction and pollution echoes what the hobbits saw in Mordor and on the battlefield at Minas Tirith, which makes it an ominous sign for the Shire. Sam's father's attitude is a reminder of most hobbits' lack of perspective and awareness of the wider world—he can't understand why Frodo would leave the Shire and has no clue about the danger of his journey, or what it was all for.



The next morning, a messenger arrives to say that Pippin's father has rallied the whole of their county. But Merry comes with worse news—a band of around a hundred ruffians is on the way, and they're lighting fires as they go. Farmer Cotton says they should hide and prepare to shoot at the men, but the Tooks arrive in time to help, and Merry corrals them into formation: he has a battle plan. The men march towards the farm, but in front of and behind them, hobbits push carts to block the way. Merry calls out to challenge them, and fighting breaks out. Eventually, all of the ruffians are killed or captured, and 19 hobbits are dead, too.

Merry and Pippin will later be remembered as the brave captains of this battle, while Frodo's main effort was to make sure the hobbits didn't kill any more men than necessary. Eventually, it's time to deal with the Chief. Frodo heads to Bag End with Merry, Pippin, Sam, and two dozen other hobbits. They pass rows of ugly new houses and the new, huge mill belching steam. Every tree has been cut down. Sam cries to see the Party Tree lying dead in a field. At Merry's signal, a company of hobbits march across the bridge. More hobbits emerge from all the houses and the new, ugly lean-tos and follow the leaders up the road to Bag End.

The garden of Bag End is full of huts and sheds placed so densely that they cut off all light to the hobbit hole's windows. Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin go inside to find the house stinking and cluttered. They search for Lotho but can't find him. Sam feels that the state of Bag End is worse than Mordor, because it's their home that's been ruined. Frodo explains that it's Saruman's work, and Lotho has been tricked by Saruman into doing his bidding. At that moment, Saruman appears, and Frodo realizes that this is the Sharkey the men were talking about. Saruman gloats in his destruction. Frodo orders him to leave, while the other hobbits urge Frodo to kill him.

Frodo again tells Saruman to leave. As Saruman turns to go, he tries to stab Frodo, but his knife hits the mithril-mail and breaks. Sam leaps forward and draws his sword on Saruman, but Frodo begs him not to hurt him: Saruman used to be a noble wizard, and though he has become wicked, there might still be hope for him to change. Saruman hates the fact that he is now at Frodo's mercy and leaves, saying that Frodo will have neither health nor long life. Saruman's servant, Wormtongue, follows him. Frodo tells Wormtongue he doesn't have to go with Saruman, and Wormtongue almost stays behind. Saruman laughs, claiming that Wormtongue murdered Lotho. Wormtongue replies that it was on Saruman's order. He grows angry and cuts Saruman's throat, at which he is shot dead by hobbit arrows.

The ruffians cause more destruction in a moment of heightened defiance and stress, displaying that their core nature is to destroy, not to protect, even in the place they've claimed as their home. The scale of the hobbits' fatalities, though small compared to the battles the four hobbits have taken part in, is monumental for the peaceful Shire. This demonstrates how profoundly the war and its fallout have affected the Shire, even though most of the hobbits are unaware of what's gone on abroad.



Each of the four hobbits' part in the battle was integral to their success and the limited destruction caused. But even in their victory, the hobbits grieve what they've lost. The felling of the Party Tree in particular is a symbol that the war had profound effects even in the furthest, quietest reaches of Middle-earth, and that hatred spreads with shocking speed. The temporary and distasteful nature of the ruffians' houses highlights that they're driven by sheer speed and productivity and not by any love for beauty.



The level of the ruffians' disregard for beauty shows clearly through their clutter and the fact that they've blocked out the precious light from Bag End's windows. That's a sign not only of their lack of care but of their short-sightedness, not spending time ensuring their lodgings are habitable. Frodo's refusal to kill Saruman highlights his complete lack of bitterness, or perhaps just his willpower not to act from a place of vengeance, having learned that mercy is a wiser and more effective tool.



Saruman would rather take his chances in the wild than be humbled by Frodo's mercy, proving that the arrogance and pride that led to his downfall are integral characteristics. Though, similar to Denethor, Saruman foresees a factual outcome—Frodo's short life—he's unable to interpret this in any way other than tragedy. Ultimately, Saruman's tendency to control and oppress others leads to his servant's anger-fueled attack and his own end.



A cloud of grey mist gathers around Saruman's body and rises above the hill before blowing away with the wind. Frodo looks at Saruman's body to see its skin age and decay suddenly. He covers it with a cloak. Merry hopes that this is the very end of the war. Sam expects that cleaning up after all this will take a long time.

The imagery of Saruman's death echoes that of Sauron's, implying that because Saruman, like Sauron, was driven by greed and destruction, his effect will be ephemeral and will have no lasting power over the free world.



BOOK 6, CHAPTER 9

The day after the battle of the Shire, Frodo releases the prisoners from the distant prisons. One of the prisoners is Lobelia, Lotho's mother, who is so sad to hear of Lotho's death that she refuses to return to Bag-End, giving the home back to Frodo. The mayor, who was also locked up, appoints Frodo as his deputy while he recovers from his imprisonment. The only thing Frodo does with this power is to reduce the number of guards to their original group. Merry and Pippin take on the task of hunting out the last ruffians. By the end of the year, all surviving ruffians have been removed from the Shire.

Even though Lotho sent his mother, Lobelia, to prison, she still loves and grieves for him, suggesting that even the greediest heart has room for love and affection. Her gift to Frodo and the mayor's trust in him as deputy show that Frodo is widely respected in the Shire and his return buoys the hobbits with hope and strength. He proves his resounding lack of greed for power by only using his title to restore things to the way they were before he left.



Sam keeps busy helping with repairs. By Yule, there isn't a trace left of any of Saruman's men's constructions, and the bricks from those have been used to repair and fortify the old hobbit holes. The hobbits find large amounts of food and drink hidden away which make the Yule season a lot more cheerful. Bag End is restored, and new hobbit holes are dug into Bagshot Row.

The hobbits' use of the ruffians' building materials to repair their own houses proves their resourcefulness and adaptability in the face of destruction. They're an industrious people and quick to set the Shire back to its previous state, suggesting that they're driven by the idea of restoring their home to all its beauty and comfort.



Sam grieves for the loss of all the trees. He remembers Galadriel's gift to him: a small box of dust with a seed inside. He sprinkles some of the dust at the roots of the new saplings and plants the seed in the Party Field where the old Party Tree was. In spring, Sam's trees grow incredibly quickly, and the tree in the Party Field is revealed to be a mallorn—the only one in this part of the world. This year in the Shire is plentiful and happy. The crops and children are healthy.

Sam's act of planting the new trees along with Galadriel's gift of the dust and seed is a sign of hope that the Shire will return to its former beauty, or perhaps become even more beautiful in the face of destruction, implying that nature will always triumph and will flourish—especially when cared for.



In early March, Frodo falls ill. Sam doesn't learn about this, because he's away on a gardening errand and Frodo tells him nothing when he returns. Bag End is now in order, and Frodo asks Sam when he'll move in to join him. Sam explains that he wants to marry Rosie, so Frodo tells him to do that and move into Bag End with her—there's plenty of room. Frodo eventually resigns the office of Deputy Mayor and focuses on his writing. Merry and Pippin live together for a while and are known around the Shire for their shining armor and joyous songs.

Frodo's desire for Sam's happiness, perhaps amplified by his gratitude for Sam's companionship on the journey to Mount Doom, leads him to keep his illness and unhappiness from him—he doesn't want to cloud Sam's peace with his problems. But he's unafraid to show Sam his affection, which allows him to invite Sam and his growing family into Bag End. This also shows that Frodo, like many hobbits, treasures companionship and the chance to share his home with the ones he loves.



Sam is saddened by the fact that Frodo disappears from the Shire's social life and isn't paid much attention. The other hobbits are more excited by Merry and Pippin, and Sam, too, though Sam doesn't realize it. In autumn, Frodo tells Sam that his wound still bothers him and will never really heal. Frodo seems to improve after this, though in March he hides his illness again because Sam and Rosie's first child arrives. Sam asks what to call her; Frodo suggests "Elanor," after the flower that grows in Lothlórien.

Frodo asks Sam to tell Rosie he'll be away for a week or two, because he wants Sam to join him on a journey. Sam thinks Frodo is going to Rivendell for Bilbo's birthday, and says he feels "torn in two" not to be able to be with both Frodo and Rosie at once. Frodo prepares for his journey by going over his writing with Sam and giving him the keys to Bag End. At the end of the book he's been writing in, there are some blank pages. Some of the titles are Bilbo's, but Frodo's reads, "The Downfall of the Lord of the Rings and the Return of the King." Sam exclaims that Frodo has nearly finished. Frodo replies that he *has* finished—the last pages are for Sam.

Frodo and Sam set out in September. Frodo begins to sing an old walking-song, which seems to be answered by a different song from a group approaching along the road. Sam is surprised to see Elrond and Galadriel in the group. They are each wearing one of the Three Rings. Bilbo follows, riding on a pony. He asks Frodo if he's ready for another journey. Sam realizes that Frodo's going with Bilbo and the Elves to the Grey Havens, and Sam can't go with them.

Sam begins to cry. He thought Frodo would live in the Shire for many years after working so hard to save it. Frodo says he thought the same, but his wound proved impossible to heal. He has made Sam his heir and tells him it's his responsibility to keep the stories of the past years so that the people of the Shire know how precious their safety is. He tells Sam to ride with him for now. When they arrive at the Havens, there's a white ship waiting, and Gandalf is beside it. They see that he's wearing the other of the Three Rings, and it's clear he will be leaving on the ship, too. Sam watches the Elves board the ship and thinks about his journey home alone, but then Merry and Pippin ride up—Gandalf told them to come.

The widespread attitude towards the four returning hobbits shows that Pippin, Merry, and Sam's desire to be celebrated in song and society is a typical hobbit desire, and able to be reciprocated by their peers. But Frodo's preference for privacy and introspection is less easily understood by the people of the Shire, which then leads to their apparent lack of respect for him. Sam's travels prove a continuing source of joy for him, suggested by the Elvish name he gives to his firstborn child; he'll never relinquish the happiness he felt in Lothlórien.



Frodo is unable to tell Sam the true reason for his upcoming journey, perhaps because he doesn't want to cause Sam more grief than necessary. The blank pages at the end of his book are a clear symbol that he's entrusting the rest of the tale to Sam, who will remain in Middle-earth and make many more stories in the years to come; further, it's a sign that Frodo has relinquished his own part of the story, accepting that his fate is to leave.



In journeying to the Undying Lands, Frodo and Bilbo are being granted a gift that is granted to the bearers of the powerful Elven rings. This suggests that the Elves appreciate Bilbo and Frodo's time as bearers of the Ring as huge sacrifices on both their parts.



The profound sadness Sam feels at Frodo's departure is a reminder of the companionship the two built not as servant and master but as equals on their journey to Mount Doom: such a journey of mutual struggle, care, and sacrifice has bound them together. This makes Frodo's decision to leave all the more drastic and proves that he feels such pain and weariness from the effects of his wounds and burdens that he's certain he won't recover during his mortal life. Gandalf told Merry and Pippin to join Sam because he's aware that companionship is one of the best ways to deal with sorrow.



Gandalf says that Sam's journey back will be better with company. He says goodbye to Sam, Merry, and Pippin, and tells them they shouldn't avoid crying: "Not all tears are an evil." Frodo kisses Merry, Pippin, and Sam and boards the ship. Eventually he smells a sweet scent and hears singing over the water and arrives in a green, bright country. Sam, Merry, and Pippin watch the ship leave in silence before riding home together. Merry and Pippin leave Sam and go in the direction of Buckland. Sam heads back to Bag End. The fire is lit and dinner is ready. Rosie embraces him and puts Elanor on his knee. Sam says, "Well, I'm back."

Gandalf imbues the parting wisdom that joy and sadness can coexist without cancelling each other out—in fact, perhaps grieving something precious makes one's joy more profound. Frodo's experience of a green, bright world upon his arrival in the Undying Lands is a final sign that beauty and nature endure even in the event of widespread destruction. This ending suggests that there is always beauty on the other side of pain.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

van Waardenberg, Sophie. "The Return of the King." LitCharts. LitCharts LLC, 19 Nov 2022. Web. 19 Nov 2022.

CHICAGO MANUAL

van Waardenberg, Sophie. "The Return of the King." LitCharts LLC, November 19, 2022. Retrieved November 19, 2022. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-return-of-the-king>.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Return of the King* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Tolkien, J. R. R.. *The Return of the King*. Del Rey. 1986.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Tolkien, J. R. R.. *The Return of the King*. New York: Del Rey. 1986.