

THE RETURN OF THE KING



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THE LORD OF THE RINGS
PART THREE

*Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,
One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.
One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.*

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SYNOPSIS

This is the third part of *The Lord of the Rings*.

The first part, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, told how Gandalf the Grey discovered that the ring possessed by Frodo the Hobbit was in fact the One Ring, ruler of all the Rings of Power. It recounted the flight of Frodo and his companions from the quiet Shire of their home, pursued by the terror of the Black Riders of Mordor, until at last, with the aid of Aragorn the Ranger of Eriador, they came through desperate perils to the house of Elrond in Rivendell.

There was held the great Council of Elrond, at which it was decided to attempt the destruction of the Ring, and Frodo was appointed the Ring-bearer. The Companions of the Ring were then chosen, who were to aid him in his quest: to come if he could to the Mountain of Fire in Mordor, the land of the Enemy himself, where alone the Ring could be unmade. In this fellowship were Aragorn, and Boromir son of the Lord of Gondor, representing Men; Legolas son of the Elven-king of Mirkwood, for the Elves; Gimli son of Glóin of the Lonely Mountain, for the Dwarves; Frodo with his servant Samwise, and his two young kinsmen Meriadoc and Peregrin, for the Hobbits; and Gandalf the Grey.

The Companions journeyed in secret far from Rivendell in the North, until baffled in their attempt to cross the high pass of Caradhras in winter, they were led by Gandalf through the hidden gate and entered the vast Mines of Moria, seeking a way beneath the mountains. There Gandalf, in battle with a dreadful spirit of the underworld, fell into a dark abyss. But Aragorn, now revealed as the hidden heir of the ancient Kings of the West, led the Company on from the East Gate of Moria, through the Elvish land of Lórien, and down the great River Anduin, until they came to the Falls of Rauros. Already they had become aware that their journey was watched by

spies, and that the creature Gollum, who once had possessed the Ring and still lusted for it, was following their trail.

It now became necessary for them to decide whether they should turn east to Mordor; or go on with Boromir to the aid of Minas Tirith, chief city of Gondor, in the coming war; or should divide. When it became clear that the Ring-bearer was resolved to continue his hopeless journey to the land of the Enemy, Boromir attempted to seize the Ring by force. The first part ended with the fall of Boromir to the lure of the Ring; with the escape and disappearance of Frodo and his servant Samwise; and the scattering of the remainder of the Fellowship by a sudden attack of orc-soldiers, some in the service of the Dark Lord of Mordor, some of the traitor Saruman of Isengard. The Quest of the Ring-bearer seemed already overtaken by disaster.

The second part, (Books Three and Four), *The Two Towers*, recounted the deeds of all the Company after the breaking of the Fellowship of the Ring. Book Three told of the repentance and death of Boromir, and of his funeral in a boat committed to the Falls of Rauros; of the capture of Meriadoc and Peregrin by orc-soldiers, who bore them towards Isengard over the eastern plains of Rohan; and of their pursuit by Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli.

The Riders of Rohan then appeared. A troop of horsemen, led by Éomer the Marshal, surrounded the orcs on the borders of the Forest of Fangorn, and destroyed them; but the hobbits escaped into the wood and there met Treebeard the Ent, secret master of Fangorn. In his company they witnessed the rousing of the wrath of the Tree-folk and their march on Isengard.

In the meanwhile Aragorn and his companions met Éomer returning from the battle. He provided them with horses, and they rode on to the forest. There while searching in vain for the hobbits, they met Gandalf again, returned from death, now the White Rider, yet veiled still in grey. With him they rode over Rohan to the halls of King Théoden of the Mark, where Gandalf healed the aged king and rescued him from the spells of Wormtongue, his evil counsellor, secret ally of Saruman. They rode then with the king and his host against the forces of Isengard, and took part in the desperate victory of the Hornburg. Gandalf then led them to Isengard, and they found the great fortress laid in ruins by the Tree-folk, and Saruman and Wormtongue besieged in the indomitable tower of Orthanc.

In the parley before the door Saruman refused to repent, and Gandalf deposed him and broke his staff, leaving him to the vigilance of the Ents. From a high window Wormtongue hurled a stone at Gandalf; but it missed him, and was picked up by Peregrin. This proved to be one of the four surviving *palantíri*, the Seeing Stones of Númenor. Later at night Peregrin succumbed to the lure of the Stone; he stole it and looked in it, and so was revealed to Sauron. The book ended with the coming of a Nazgûl over the plains of Rohan, a Ringwraith mounted on a flying steed, presage of imminent war. Gandalf delivered the *palantír* to Aragorn, and taking Peregrin rode away to Minas Tirith.

Book Four turned to Frodo and Samwise, now lost in the bleak hills of Emyr Muil. It told how they escaped from the hills, and were overtaken by Sméagol-Gollum; and how Frodo tamed Gollum and almost overcame his malice, so that Gollum led them through the Dead Marshes and ruined lands to the Morannon, the Black Gate of the Land of Mordor in the North.

There it was impossible to enter and Frodo accepted Gollum's advice: to seek a 'secret entrance' that he knew of, away south in the Mountains of Shadow, the western walls of Mordor. As they journeyed thither they were taken by a scouting-force of the Men of Gondor led by Faramir brother of Boromir. Faramir discovered the nature of their quest, but resisted the temptation to which Boromir had succumbed, and sent them forward on the last stage of their journey to Cirith Ungol, the Spider's Pass; though he warned them that it was a place of mortal peril, of which Gollum had told them less than he knew. Even as they reached the Cross-roads and took the path to the ghastly city of Minas Morgul, a great darkness issued from Mordor, covering all the lands. Then Sauron sent forth his first army, led by the black King of the Ringwraiths: the War of the Ring had begun.

Gollum guided the hobbits to a secret way that avoided Minas Morgul, and in the darkness they came at last to Cirith Ungol. There Gollum fell back into evil, and attempted to betray them to the monstrous guardian of the pass, Shelob. He was frustrated by the heroism of Samwise, who beat off his attack, and wounded Shelob.

The second part ends with the choices of Samwise. Frodo, stung by Shelob, lies dead, as it seems: the quest must end in disaster, or Samwise must abandon his master. At length he takes the Ring and attempts to carry on the hopeless quest alone. But just as he is about to cross into the land of

Mordor, orcs come up from Minas Morgul and down from the tower of Cirith Ungol that guards the crown of the pass. Hidden by the Ring Samwise learns from the bickering of the orcs that Frodo is not dead but drugged. Too late he pursues them; but the orcs carry off the body of Frodo down a tunnel leading to the rear gate of their tower. Samwise falls in a swoon before it as it closes with a clang.

This, the third and last part, will tell of the opposing strategies of Gandalf and Sauron, until the final catastrophe and the end of the great darkness. We return first to the fortunes of battle in the West.