

# **The Presence**

## Chapter 1 The Selection of the Istari



don't want to go. I'm not strong enough, and he's extremely dangerous," said Gandalf.

Saruman and Alatar exchanged a look. Even Radagast, who was gentle and timid, wasn't afraid of Morgoth's most powerful servant.

Manwë sighed. "Each of you was chosen for a reason. You are more able to defeat Sauron Gorthaur than are the mightiest among the Valar."

Yavanna, one of the few among the Valar who spent time in Arda, was the first to sense the Shadow growing in Mirkwood. She thought it might be Sauron taking form again, and proposed a mission to Arda to deal with him. Aulë chose Saruman to lead it.

"Sauron is extremely dangerous. The Valar may have hand-selected each of the five Istari, the Wizards, but except for Saruman, none of us is particularly wise or strong," said Gandalf.

Saruman stood up a little straighter. It was true, he was the most powerful Maia among the Istari. All the others were ordinary members of their households, but after Sauron left, Saruman was the first among Aulë's remaining Maia.

Gandalf went on. "If you really want to defeat Sauron, send those who are great among the Maiar. Eönwë is the mightiest swordsman in Ea. Ossë is almost as strong, and he's aggressive and fearless. Or send the Valar who subdued Morgoth, like Tulkas, Oromë, and Aulë."

"I don't want to repeat the mistakes of Beleriand. We used overwhelming force against Morgoth, and it worked, but the

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damage to Arda was too great," said Manwë.

"Do you want us to arrest him when we find him?" asked Saruman.

Saruman imagined his adversary cowering before them. He thought the five of them could subdue him easily. Saruman had helped Aulë forge Angainor, the chain of oppression used on Morgoth. He wondered if Aulë would make a chain for them to use on Sauron.

"Your mission isn't to arrest him. It's to contain him and prevent his influence from spreading," said Manwë.

Aulë stepped forward. "Don't try to capture him. He's too dangerous. He has many faults, far more than I knew, but cowardice isn't one of them. He's a fighter, and he's stubborn. Even if the situation was hopeless, he'd resist you as long as he was still breathing."

Manwë agreed. "You will not confront Sauron directly. It is not your place to subdue him with force. This time, our approach will be subtle. You will advise the Free People, and give them hope."

"So you have no plan to arrest him or have him stand trial? We're just going to limit his influence? He committed terrible crimes, and nothing bad is going to happen to him?" Saruman was puzzled.

"Oh, yes it will," said Manwë. His face was grim.

Saruman didn't know how he felt about that.

Saruman wasn't surprised when he was named Head of the Istari, but he was surprised by the reason. As Gandalf pointed out, he was the oldest and wisest among them, and as one of Aulë's people, he was the only one who could understand the inner workings of the Ring.

But while those things were important, they chose Saruman because they thought, since he was Sauron's brother<sup>1</sup>, he among them knew Sauron best.

Actually, Saruman didn't know Sauron well at all, even

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<sup>1</sup> Strictly speaking, Maiar aren't born, and they don't have parents. But Sauron and Saruman had been brother-apprentices in the Mansions of Aulë, where Sauron was First Maia and Saruman was Second.

though they grew up together.

Saruman wondered why they'd never been close. Their personalities were similar. They were both creative, with a love of order and control. And Sauron wasn't much older than he was.

But Sauron's closest friends were Eönwë and Ilmarë and Ossë. The four of them were First Maiar to the four most powerful Valar. They formed a group which Saruman could never hope to join. They spent all their free time together, and knew all of each other's secrets. On the other hand, Saruman couldn't remember a single occasion when he and Sauron had ever discussed anything private or meaningful.

Once, when Saruman was young, he went upstairs in the middle of the day to get something from the apprentices' dormitory. A dozen or more of them slept in the long attic room, and their beds were crammed together any way they'd fit. Saruman's bed was next to Sauron's, so close it was almost touching.

When Saruman entered the room, he saw Sauron lying face down on his bed, obviously upset about something. Saruman wanted to ask what was the matter, but he knew from experience he'd get no answer, not even a muffled 'Go away!' Probably Aulë had beaten him, or a girl he liked had rejected him.

Saruman knelt beside his own bed and felt underneath it for the box that contained his treasures. He found what he wanted, closed the box, and returned it to its place under his bed. Then he got up to go, without ever saying a word.

When they were young, Saruman lived in Sauron's shadow. Aulë made no secret that Sauron was his favorite. Saruman was relieved when Sauron left to follow Morgoth in Rebellion. Without the competition, Saruman came into his own, and flourished.

But even after Sauron was gone, he still got all the attention. 'Why did he leave? How could someone so responsible have rebelled? We never saw it coming.' Saruman was still living in Sauron's shadow.

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But although Sauron was his rival and Saruman wanted him gone, he didn't actually want anything bad to happen to him.

He still remembered that terrible day at the end of the Second Age, when Aulë had gathered them together and told them Sauron had been killed. Saruman didn't expect to be much affected by the news, but he went off by himself for the rest of the day, and he couldn't eat his dinner that night.

## Chapter 2 The Shadow in Mirkwood



Radagast's home in Rhosgobel near the southern border of Mirkwood was homey and pleasant. The weather was grey outside, but a cheerful fire burned on the hearth. All five Istari were seated around it, but they paid little attention to their surroundings, for their purpose was deadly serious.

The Istari had been told to look for Sauron in Southern Mirkwood. For a thousand years, they'd been trying to find him.

They knew something evil dwelled there. It drew evil things to itself, spiders, centipedes, and poisonous plants. Mirkwood had become a dark and unwholesome place.

"When I walk in the forest of Mirkwood, I can feel its Presence," said Radagast.

"It attracts more than just spiders. The local people say a sorcerer arrived in Southern Mirkwood recently. He built himself a fortress on a rocky outcropping called Amon Lanc, the Bald Hill. Recently, the local people have started calling it Dol Guldur, the Hill of Sorcery."

"What do we know about this sorcerer?" asked Gandalf.

"Very little. No one's ever seen him, but they say he practices dark magic. They call him the Necromancer," said Radagast.

"How powerful is he? Is he in the same league as the Witch King of Angmar?" asked Gandalf.

"Who?" asked Alatar.

"A warlord in Northern Arnor. He launches raids on the people of Cardolan from his stronghold in Carn Dûm," said Gandalf.

## The Shadow in Mirkwood

“The Necromancer doesn’t have enough soldiers to launch raids. He can defend the fortress, but that’s about it,” said Radagast.

“Is there any connection between the Necromancer and the Witch King?” asked Alatar.

“I don’t think so. Arnor is a long way from here,” said Gandalf.

“The birds tell me that the spiders are most heavily concentrated around the Necromancer’s fortress,” said Radagast.

“Meaning?” said Saruman.

“I don’t think the Necromancer was drawn to Mirkwood by the Presence,” said Radagast. “I think the Necromancer is the Presence.”

“So that’s where Sauron’s been hiding. We’ve been looking for him for a thousand years, and he was right there the whole time,” said Gandalf.

## Chapter 3 The Ways of the Enemy



Saruman sat in the vault containing the archives of Osgiliath, surrounded by scrolls and documents going back thousands of years. There were even a few that had survived from Beleriand back in the First Age.

Saruman enjoyed the work of scholarship. He like learning things he hadn't known before, and making connections, and knowing things no one else knew. He took pleasure in holding the ancient parchments in his hands, and reading archaic languages written in old fashioned handwriting.

He came here to research Sauron's activities in the Second Age. He learned about the battles Sauron fought, the breeding of orcs, and the construction of Barad-dûr.

He was also looking for accounts of historical events that would give him insight into Sauron's character. He wanted to know what Sauron would do in various situations.

He was horrified by what he learned. In the First Age, when Sauron served Morgoth, the Elves called him 'the Dreaded' and 'the Cruel. But it got worse. In the Second Age, when he put on the Ring, he became a monster. He laid Eregion to waste, and had his friend Celebrimbor tortured to death. Those who opposed him were offered up to Morgoth as human sacrifice.

He wasn't the same person Saruman knew in Valinor. Back then, he was the Responsible One. He was grave and serious, and had a sarcastic mouth, but he wasn't mean. He certainly wasn't dangerous. They used to keep dogs as pets, and Saruman remembered how gentle he was with the puppies. Could the Ring have corrupted him that much, that fast?

*What an evil thing the Ring must be. I hope I never have to touch*



## The Ways of the Enemy

*it. He felt pity for Sauron, poisoned by his own creation. I wonder if he even knew it was happening?*

Saruman turned back to the scrolls. He read accounts of Sauron's capture by Ar-Pharazôn in the late Second Age. The accounts described how Sauron was marched through the streets of Umbar after being taken prisoner. His captors thought his defeat left him humbled and submissive. They thought so right up until the moment he reduced their island to a crater on the ocean floor.<sup>2</sup>

Sauron is unimaginably dangerous, thought Saruman. I don't know how we're going to contain him.

Tar-Eldacar, the King of Gondor, stuck his head in the door of the archives. One of the great things about being a Maia was that he had the ability to influence people and win their trust easily. "Are you ready to take a break? I have something interesting to show you," he said.

Without it, Saruman, a stranger, could never have walked in off the street and gotten an audience with the king of the most powerful realm in Arda. Within a short time, Saruman had become his trusted friend.

Tar-Eldacar led him up flight after flight of stairs, to the very top of the building. The Dome of the Stars was built on a bridge over the river Anduin.

On the climb up, he could see the Basilica, on the next bridge over, which once housed the twin thrones of Isildur and Anárion. The two bridges were close to the point of touching, and were connected by a huge courtyard. Saruman like to let on as though nothing impressed him, but the massive stone works for which Gondor was famed made his jaw drop. Finally, they reached the top of the building. The domed ceiling was painted dark blue and sprinkled with stars. He recognized the constellations of the summer sky, the Sickle of Melkor<sup>3</sup> prominent among them.

In the center of the room, Saruman saw a huge glass orb. It

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<sup>2</sup> Sauron didn't reduce Númenor to a crater, nor did he see it coming. However, he was responsible for provoking Ilúvatar to do it.

<sup>3</sup> The Big Dipper

was almost as tall as he was. It rested on a low pedestal built into the floor.

"What is it?" asked Saruman.

"A Palantir, a seeing stone. Seven of them were gifted to the Númenorian kings, but this one is the largest and most powerful," said Tar-Eldacar.

Tar-Eldacar showed him how to look into it. Saruman positioned himself so that he was looking through the stone towards Mirkwood. In the swirling fog within the orb, images of dark green leaves began to take shape, acre upon acre of ancient forest.

He moved a little to the left, until Southern Mirkwood came into view. The Palantir showed him huge spiders among the trees, their webs ghostly white between the trees.

He fixed his thoughts on Dol Guldur. The image in the Palantir settled upon a bald hill standing tall above the forest canopy, with stone walls on its peak like a crown. He willed the Palantir to go inside its walls. The stonework dissolved in a mist, revealing ...

Tar-Eldacar touched his arm.

"That's enough for now. If you don't know what you're doing, you can get into serious trouble."

## Chapter 4 The Study of Ringlore



he five Istari were assembled at Radagast's house in Rhosgobel, discussing how each of them would study some aspect of the Ways of the Enemy.

"If we know everything there is to know about Sauron, we'll be better able to counter him," said Saruman.

"I can watch Dol Guldur," said Radagast.

"I'll go to talk to Elrond and Glorfindel. They faced Sauron in battle a number of times.<sup>4</sup> They can tell us how Sauron fights a war," said Gandalf.

"I'd like to know what powers the Ring gave him," said Saruman.

"Why? He doesn't have it anymore. I don't see what we'd gain by learning more about it. Are you just looking for an excuse to study something related to craft?" asked Pallando.

"When he made the Ring, he put a lot of himself into it. I'd like to know, how much the loss of it weakened him," said Saruman.

"I'd like to know what would happen if he found it again," said Gandalf.



Saruman followed Elrond down a steep flight of stairs cut into the rock foundations beneath Imladris. Elrond had offered to show him to the Workshop of the Elves, where the Elven Smiths had their forges. Saruman had never been down here

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<sup>4</sup> In Eregion in SA 1700, and again in the War of the Last Alliance in SA 3434.

before.

Saruman had come to Imladris to interview Elrond and several others about Sauron's motives when he tried to conquer all of Arda in SA 1700. Elrond met Sauron when he first appeared as Annatar. He was the first to suspect there was something 'off' about him.

When Saruman finished talking to everyone he had come to see, Elrond suggested he talk to the Elven smiths from Ost-in-Edhil.

"I can introduce you to a few people who worked with Celebrimbor at the Gwaith-i-Mírdain. They witnessed the Great Rings being forged. They may even have helped to make them," said Elrond.

"But remember, they were traumatized by what happened afterwards.<sup>5</sup> They may not want to talk about it, so be prepared to back off."

They reached the bottom of the staircase and entered the forge. Saruman smelled smoke and heard the clink of hammers against steel. They stopped before an older smith, working by himself. Elrond introduced them and left them alone together.

Saruman waited quietly while the smith gathered his thoughts. Finally he began to speak.

"I apprenticed under Celebrimbor. I was anxious about going to work for him. He was the head of the Gwaith-i-Mírdain, the Workshop of the Jewel Smiths. He was also the leader of the city, so I expected him to be stern and commanding. Worse, he was Fëanor's grandson, so I expected him to be self-centered, violent tempered, and more than a little crazy.

"But Celebrimbor wasn't like his grandfather. He was one of the most good-natured and reasonable people I've ever met.

"He and Annatar were a team. Each achieved more with the help of the other than they ever could have accomplished alone. They did amazing things together, and were close friends, as well.

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<sup>5</sup> Please see the MEFA award winning fanfic, 'The Apprentice' by [pandemonium\\_213](#)

## The Study of Ringlore

“No, I never thought there was anything ‘off’ about Annatar. Of course, we now know he was Sauron in disguise, but at the time, we never suspected.

“He became a respected member of our community. Then one day, he was gone. We never knew why. Celebrimbor knew, but he wouldn’t say anything other than, ‘Good riddance to bad rubbish’. Obviously they’d quarreled. But they’d worked together in harmony for almost three hundred years. We expected them to patch things up, but they never did. Their feud escalated until it ended with Celebrimbor’s death.”

Saruman knew the story. Sauron tortured Celebrimbor to death, then impaled his body on a pole and carried it into battle like a banner. Even for Sauron, that was bad.

“Tell me about the Great Rings. How were they made?” asked Saruman.

“Each one took at least a year to make. They weren’t intended for any particular race, it just ended up that seven were given to the Dwarves and nine to Men. They’re more or less interchangeable, although the different races use them different ways. They don’t make a man greedy for gold, for instance, and they won’t lengthen the life of a Dwarf.”

“How did Sauron bind the Great Rings to the One?” asked Saruman.

“He developed a binding mechanism long before the Great Rings were made. We know that, because it was built into each of them at the time they were made,” said the smith.

“Are you sure? Which of the Great Rings was made first?” asked Saruman.

“The one given to the Chief of the Nazgûl,” said the smith.

*That one’s definitely bound,* thought Saruman.

“Now that we know to look for it, we can see evidence of the binding mechanism in early drawings and figures,” said the smith.

He led Saruman over to a row of narrow drawers where drawings were stored flat like maps. He pulled open one of the drawers and lifted out a sheet of parchment, brown with age.

"It's a copy, but it's one of the best examples of Annatar's drawings we have. It shows most of the mechanisms of a Great Ring. If the binding mechanism is documented anywhere, it's here," said the smith.

"Do you have any of Annatar's original drawings or notes?" asked Saruman.

"No, we burned them when we learned who he was."

"How were the three Elven Rings made?"

"They're different than the sixteen Great Rings that came before them. The Elven Rings required more skill to make than anything we'd ever done before, and they were harder to make. It took Celebrimbor and the Elven smiths ninety years to make three of them."

"How did Sauron bind the Three to the One, given that he never saw or touched them?" asked Saruman.

"Our best guess is that he bound the Three exactly the same way he bound all the other great Rings.

"But weren't the Elven Rings entirely different from the previous Sixteen?"

"They were. But Celebrimbor was like any other craftsman. He concentrated on the creative parts of the design, and reused the utilitarian parts from previous work. It's likely that the binding mechanism was copied into the Three by accident.<sup>6</sup>

"Do you think the Elven Rings could be unbound? Could they be freed from the One?" asked Saruman.

"Without having physical possession of the One? Not a chance. With it? I don't know. It might be possible.

"But even if it were, I don't know that it would be a good idea. The Three draw their power from the One. It would be unwise to risk harming them, because they preserve Imladris, Lothlorian, and Lindon, our three havens," said the smith.

"Could the One be destroyed?" asked Saruman.

"I don't see why not. Four of the Great Rings were

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<sup>6</sup> In the language of Object Oriented Programming, the Elven Rings inherited from the sixteen Great Rings. The binding function, which Annatar bundled with other housekeeping utilities, was too useful to delete, but too mundane to examine closely.

consumed by Dragon's fire. I imagine it could be, too," said the smith.

"I know you weren't there, but what do you know about how the One was made?" asked Saruman.

"Forging it probably wasn't all that hard, but it was dangerous."

"Because he was working in a volcano?" asked Saruman.

"Because he was attempting something that had never been done before, and which may have been beyond his ability. He had a lot of self-confidence, but as a craftsman, he wasn't all that good."

"But how exactly did he do it?" asked Saruman.

"We don't know much, but we assume he made a simplified version of a Great Ring."

"A simplified version? Surely the One was more complicated than the other Great Rings? It's far more powerful than the others, and all the others are bound to it."

"From what I saw, Annatar was more brawn than brains. The high temperatures in the volcano and the large infusion of his own power are both examples of resorting to force. Not to mention how fast he made it," said the smith.

"But I thought it took him a hundred years to forge the One," said Saruman.

"More like ten. Probably less.

"But they say he began working on it right after he left the Gwaith-i-Mírdain, and finished it a hundred years later?"

"That's right. After he left us, he went straight to Mordor and set up his workshop in the Sammath Naur. He probably began to draw the design then.

"And I believe he began thinking about it much earlier, before any of the Great Rings were made, based on the binding mechanism.

However, I don't think he made the One until after the Elven Rings were finished. The One could only have been forged after the Three were completed, because he couldn't have bound the Three to it unless they already existed," said the smith.

"There was a ten year window in which it must have

happened. The Elven rings were made in SA 1590. Sauron began wearing his Ring ten years later. We know this, because the bearers of the Elven Rings felt it when he put it on.

"And it's likely didn't find out about the Three right away. They were made in great secrecy and kept hidden from him. Depending on when he learned of them, it's possible he made the One in only a year."

"That's fast, right?" asked Saruman.

"For a project of that magnitude, it's astonishing," said the smith.

"Are you sure he made it that quickly? Couldn't he have begun the One first, and bound the others to it later?" asked Saruman.

"I don't think so. I expect the binding spell was cast over the Ring when it was made. Perhaps it could be done later, but I don't think it would take," said the smith.

"And think of the timing. The Three were already bound when Sauron put the Ring on for the first time and claimed it," said the smith.

"Claimed it?"

"All the Great Rings are claimed by the person who becomes their Master. A ring can be used without being claimed, of course, but it's not nearly as responsive."

"How much of himself did he put into it, do you think?" asked Saruman.

"That's the surprising thing. When Sauron made the Ring, he put the greater part of his own power into it. That's a very risky thing to do," said the smith.

"He's not usually one to take stupid risks," said Saruman.

"I think it happened like this. He planned to put a portion of his own power into the Ring, but after he started, he discovered it wasn't enough. But if he stopped at that point, he'd lose everything he'd put in so far.

"So he put in more, and when that wasn't enough, he kept going. He couldn't quit at that point, because if he did, he'd be crippled for life.

"And if he ran out of power before he put enough to finish



the project, he'd have perished. It must have been like a gambler getting caught in a double or nothing bet. One story says he was so frightened while he was forging it that tears ran down his face.

"Anyway, I think that's how he ended up putting so much of himself into it. Although in the end, from his point of view, it turned out well. He lived, and the Ring was even more powerful than anticipated.

"But still, he's lucky he wasn't permanently crippled, or more likely, killed outright. If forging the Ring was a thing done in anger, then anger drove him to take stupid risks. He could have planned carefully and taken precautions, but my impression is, he barged right in and thought about it later."

"Let me ask you something else. Why did the Ring make Sauron evil?" said Saruman.

"I don't think it did," said the smith.

"It must have. Before he forged the Ring, he lived among the Elves, and was generally liked and well regarded.

"But right afterwards, he led an army from Mordor to the Grey Havens, burning everything in his path and wiping out the Gwaith-i-Mírdain. The Ring must be toxic. Wearing it must have poisoned his mind. He was never like that when I knew him, and from what you say, when you knew him either," said Saruman.

"I don't think the Ring is toxic. It's part of him. It didn't put cruelty or malice into him, it only exaggerated what was already there," said the smith.

Saruman got up to go.

"Is there anything else we should know?" he asked.

"That's pretty much it. No wait, there's one thing. Sauron put so much of himself into the Ring, it's stronger than he is. Normally that wouldn't matter, because it's part of him. But if someone else were to claim it, that person would also control him."

"What do you mean, control him?"

"Read his thoughts, overpower his will. Enslave him, basically."

## Saruman's Journey

"You mean, make him a ringwraith to his own Ring?"

"Pretty much."

Saruman gasped. Until now, The White Council had no way to control Sauron. This was a gift.

"How would someone claim the Ring?" Saruman asked.

"If it's like all the other Great Rings, you put it on and say 'I claim this for my own.' The specific words don't matter, but you have to really mean it. And you have to be strong enough to pull it off."

In his mind's eye Saruman saw the Ring on his hand and heard himself speaking the words to claim it.

Saruman looked up and saw Elrond listening to them. Elrond waited until the smith had gone, then said to Saruman,

"It is unwise to study too deeply the ways of the Enemy."

## Chapter 5 The Return of the Nazgûl



Saruman arrived at Imladris after a long ride from Rhosgobel. As soon as he entered Elrond's halls, Erester ran up to him with the news.

"The Witch King of Angmar has been defeated!"<sup>7</sup>

"What happened?"

"Glorfindel and Eärnur overwhelmed him in the field of battle, and he fled."

"That's excellent news!"

"Not really. Before he rode off, he mocked Glorfindel and threw back his hood, revealing a steel crown with nothing beneath it. Do you know what that means? He's a wraith. He can't be killed," said Erester.

"Not just a wraith, a Ringwraith. Glorfindel recognized him as the Chief of the Nazgûl," said Elrond.

"After he fled, I suppose he went straight to his master in Dol Guldur?" asked Saruman.

"That's the odd thing. He didn't. Gandalf tell me that a few months after the Witch King left Arnor, he was seen entering Mordor," said Elrond.

"Maybe he doesn't know Sauron is in Dol Guldur," said Saruman.

"Or maybe the Necromancer isn't Sauron," said Elrond.



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<sup>7</sup> Battle of Fornost, TA 1975, in which the Witch King of Angmar was defeated and driven from Arnor.

## Saruman's Journey

Saruman was traveling south to Minas Tirith when he met Gandalf on the road.

"Did you hear? Minas Ithil has fallen!"<sup>8</sup> said Gandalf.

"What happened?"

"Ever since the Plague, Gondor hasn't been able to man the remote outposts at full strength. Minas Ithil, like the other outposts, was lightly garrisoned. They couldn't defend themselves against a determined attack.

"And the attack, when it came, was totally unexpected. The Witch King came out of the pass leading a host of orcs. The defenders held out as long as they could, but in the end, they were overwhelmed. The attackers captured Minas Ithil and slaughtered every living soul inside.

"Perhaps the defenders could have fought off a host of orcs, but they were no match for the Nazgûl."

"There was more than one?"

"We saw four or five Nazgûl during the attack. Now Minas Ithil is occupied by at least half a dozen of them," said Gandalf.

"How do you know?" asked Saruman.

"We questioned the orcs, who refer to them as the Shriekers. They call their leader Number One, and the others are three, four, five, six, and eight. Or possibly nine. They were a little unclear about the last one."

"What about two and seven?"

"They're still unaccounted for."

"How long ago did this happen?" asked Saruman.

"Six months ago."

"That's odd. I just came from Southern Mirkwood, and the Necromancer is still there. You'd think Sauron would have returned to Mordor, now that his servants have captured it. I wonder why he hasn't."

"When we set out from Valinor, I was sure the Presence in Mirkwood was Sauron. But the Nazgûl aren't acting like their Master is still around," said Saruman.

"What do you mean?" said Gandalf.

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<sup>8</sup> Minas Ithil was captured by the Nazgûl in TA 2002 after a five year siege.

## The Return of the Nazgûl

“As far as we could tell, there was no communication between the Witch King and the Necromancer. And the Witch King didn’t go to Dol Guldur when he was defeated at Fornost, he went to Mordor. And now, the Witch King and most of the other Nazgûl are in Minas Ithil,” said Saruman.

“It’s Minas Morgul now. The Nazgûl renamed it,” said Gandalf.

“The Necromancer is still in Dol Guldur, and there’s been no communication between Mordor and Dol Guldur. I don’t think he’s Sauron,” said Saruman.

“I still think he is. I’d like to go inside Dol Guldur and see for myself,” said Gandalf.

# **Vanished**

## Chapter 6 The Hill of Dark Knowledge



From the shelter of the tree, Gandalf looked up at the sheer walls of Dol Guldur. He had come here to learn the identity of the Necromancer. He still believed the sorcerer who occupied this stronghold was Sauron.

He could tell that the fortress was occupied. Smoke rose from the chimneys, and he could hear dogs barking inside. The sun reflected from the helms of soldiers keeping watch from the top of the walls.

Gandalf knew he was taking a huge risk. He was unfamiliar with the layout of the fortress. If he had to make a run for it, he might take a wrong turn and get trapped inside.

He circled the stronghold, never quite leaving the safety of the trees. He was looking for a portal, the exit to an escape tunnel. All fortresses have them. In times of peace, the defenders often forget they're there.

By late afternoon, he found what looked like the mouth of a tunnel, overgrown and hidden from view. He retreated into the forest and waited overnight. A few hours before dawn, when it was still too dark to be seen, he crept up to the mouth of the tunnel and crawled in.

The walls of the tunnel were bare rock, not smooth like those of an escape tunnel, but pockmarked from digging tools, like the inside of a mine shaft. Radagast said the dwarves mined this hill long ago, it was said to be half hollowed out from their tunnels, and that the Necromancer lived in their abandoned structures before he built his fortress.

He concealed himself inside the tunnel entrance. There was no point entering the fortress just yet. He was looking for

someone, and the corridors would be empty right now. At this hour, everyone was still asleep.

Several hours later, the sky began to get light. The outline of the fortress was stark against the eastern sky. A bell tolled to signal a change in the watch, and new soldiers replaced the old on top of the walls. From the far end of the tunnel, he heard sounds that told him people inside the fortress were up and moving around.

He guessed his quarry was awake by now. It was time to go hunting.

Gandalf crawled the length of the mineshaft on hands and knees, the mineshaft slanting upward. It was pitch black inside, so he made his way by feel. The smell got worse as he got closer to the fortress, putrid and overly sweet at the same time, like rotting apples. He tried to breathe through his mouth.

At one point, his hand touched something strange. He picked it up and felt it, it was a shoe. Nearby, he touched a pile of ashes with bits of wood in them, and a broken piece of china. He realized he was kneeling in a trash heap. He saw grey light ahead and moved towards it, stepping carefully through the rotten vegetable peelings.

The tunnel opened onto what looked like a storeroom; bins lined the wall, holding apples and root vegetables. In the distance, he heard voices. He hugged the wall and stayed in the shadows near a row of barrels.

Then he heard a bell ringing. It was followed by the sound of shouting, running feet, and a door being slammed. He had no idea how he'd been detected, but obviously they knew he was here.

He was lucky they noticed his presence right away. He had no map of the fortress, no knowledge of how it was laid out. They raised the alarm when he'd barely gotten inside. He didn't get lost when he had to leave in a hurry.

He hurried out through the old mining shaft to the safety of the woods. Already, patrols were fanning out to search the sides of the hill. He reached the trees and kept running.

Gandalf returned to Dol Guldur a few days later. The



## The Hill of Dark Knowledge

drawbridge was down and the main gates stood open. There were no soldiers on the walls, no smoke above chimneys, no horses in the stables. The stronghold had been abandoned.

He went inside to explore. He saw a pile of papers on a fireplace hearth, reduced to ashes. In the next room, he saw the same thing. Every scrap of paper in the fortress had been burned. Whoever lived here went to a lot of trouble to keep his identity secret. Gandalf left knowing little more than when he went in, other than the layout of the building.

## Chapter 7 Where Sauron Might Hide



he Istari met at Rhosgobel to hear about Gandalf's attempt to identify the Necromancer.

"Did you get a good look at him?" asked Saruman.

"No. I never saw him. He fled before I got inside," said Gandalf.

"He left without a fight. That's not like him," said Saruman, frowning.

"Well, maybe he was ready to return to Mordor, and this gave him an excuse," said Gandalf.

They decided to watch the entrances into Mordor. If he passed by them on the road, they would see him.

"He'll almost certainly take the road from Dol Guldur to Cirith Ungol. Then, he'll either enter Mordor from the north, or circle around the mountains and approach Minas Morgul from the west," said Saruman.

"The road to Minas Morgul is faster. That's probably what he'll do," said Gandalf.

"Let's split up and set a watch on both ways into Mordor. If we get there before he does, we'll see him," said Saruman.



They watched the roads into Mordor for several months, but in all that time, they did not see Sauron attempt to enter his former realm.

"There's only one other place he could have gone, his Eastern Fortress," said Saruman.

The Eastern Fortress was Sauron's bolt hole of last resort. It

## Where Sauron Might Hide

was built when he served Morgoth, during the wars with the Valar. He used it not for defense, but for concealment.

"We don't even know where it is. All we know is that it's so far east and south of Rhûn, beyond the reach of the Valar," said Pallando.

"Assuming it even exists," said Alatar.

"You think it doesn't?" said Saruman.

"No one's ever seen it. A fortress wreathed in flame? That sounds like the stuff of myth."



Saruman climbed up the ridge of a hill and got his first good look.

The walls had fallen into disrepair. Plants were growing from the cracks between the stones. The encircling flames had gone out long ago. Saruman's shoulders sagged in disappointment.

Alatar and Pallando caught up with him and stood at his side.

"So, this is it?" asked Alatar.

"We've found abandoned fortresses before. What makes you think this is the one we're looking for?" asked Pallando.

"See the black smudges on the ground? Those are burn marks. If you look closely, you can tell they go all the way around the fortress. This place was once girdled with a ring of fire," said Saruman.

"It looks like it was occupied recently. I mean, more recently than Morgoth's time. Otherwise there'd be nothing left but a pile of rocks," said Pallando.

"I expect Sauron came here to hide after Morgoth was defeated. He disappeared for over a thousand years. We didn't see him again until he joined the Elven Smiths in Eregion," said Saruman.

Saruman studied the fortress more closely, looking for any signs of occupation. There were none.

"Shall we go inside and look around?" asked Pallando.

No smoke came from the chimneys. Grass was growing over the path leading to the main gate. The roofs looked like they might collapse at any time.

"No, I think we've seen enough. It's been abandoned," said Saruman.

Wherever Sauron is now, he isn't here. Saruman thought.

"He didn't go to Minas Morgul. And obviously he didn't come here either. Those were the two places I thought he'd go. Where should we look next?"

"I don't think we need to," said Alatar.

"What?" said Saruman, not understanding.

"We did what we set out to do. We drove Sauron out of Mirkwood, and as far as we can tell, out of Arda as well. In any case, he's gone. We're not going to find him," said Alatar.

"If it even was Sauron in the first place. We never actually saw him. We don't know for sure who was in Dol Guldur," said Pallando.

"Well, I'll be off then," said Alatar.

"What?"

"I'd like to spend more time in the East. The Far East of Arda has never had much attention from the Ainur, and I'd like to make up for that," said Alatar.

"And I was sent here to be a friend to Alatar. So I should stay with him," said Pallando.

"You're leaving the Istari?" Saruman said in disbelief.

"Our work here is done," said Alatar.

## Chapter 8 The Presence Returns



Radagast was in a state of extreme agitation. He had urgent news, and he'd ridden all night to deliver it.

"It's back!" Radagast said, breathing hard from exertion. "The Presence in Mirkwood has come back! It's much, much stronger than before. We have to do something."

Saruman thought about it. If Sauron had returned, he should be as strong as when he left. Unless, while he was gone, he'd found the Ring.

The room started to spin. Saruman grabbed the door frame to keep his balance.

Why hadn't they looked for the Ring before? The Istari had been in Arda for over a thousand years, trying to contain Sauron and limit his influence. In all that time, they hadn't made any effort to find the Ring and lock it away.

If only he'd spent his time looking for the Ring rather than just reading about it in the library. He could have found it by now. He could have hidden it somewhere safe, or better yet, brought it to Aulë to unmake. Saruman reproached himself. He could have prevented this from happening.

"This is bad. I'm going to call a meeting of the White Council," Saruman said.

Saruman couldn't understand how Sauron found it. He would have been wearing it when he emerged from the safety of his fortress to meet Gil-galad in single combat. When he fell, his body would have crumpled into dust. The Ring would almost certainly have been lost in the loose gravel and cinders on the slopes of Orodruin, unnoticed under his clothes and armor, if the conquering forces didn't know to look for it.

## Saruman's Journey

And why would they? They didn't know of its existence. Ar-Pharazôn hadn't either, when he took Sauron prisoner a hundred years earlier.

Saruman wondered out loud how Sauron could even have found the exact spot where the Ring was lost. Even when it's not erupting, the features of the cinder cone change whenever the wind blows. "There are no landmarks," said Saruman.

"Yes, there are. After the battle, the Last Alliance erected a monument marking the spot where Gil-galad and Elendil fell. Sauron fell there, too," said Gandalf.

They couldn't confront Sauron directly. Their charter forbade it. But they could mobilize the Free Peoples, and give them advice and counsel. It was a measure of their desperation that they summoned a meeting of the White Council, the Great Lords of the Eldar.

## Chapter 9 The White Council



The White Council had met only once before, to decide where to relocate what remained of the population of Eregion, after Sauron laid waste to it in the Second Age. Now the Council was assembled again. Last time, they were running away from Sauron. This time, they were going to stand and fight.

Saruman looked around at the Great among the Elves, and felt a little bit awed. Galadriel, Elrond, Círdan, Glorfindel, Celeborn. Only Gil-galad, killed by Sauron in single combat in the Second Age, was absent.

"Gandalf, will you lead the White Council?" Galadriel asked, before Saruman could propose himself as leader.

"No, I must refuse." said Gandalf. "I won't be bound by any but those who sent me."

"I will lead the Council," said Saruman, deeply annoyed with both of them.

*Why are we even having this conversation?* Saruman thought. As Head of the Order, Saruman just assumed the position was his. Exasperated, he got up and took his place at the head of the table.

Saruman stood to address the Council. "Four hundred years after Gandalf drove Sauron from Dol Guldur, he returned with renewed strength. I believe that, while he was away, Sauron found the Ring."

There were gasps around the table. The Istari had talked about it among themselves, but this was the first time the Elves had heard.

"Sauron didn't find the Ring," said Elrond. "The three

Ringbearers would have known if he had it. He doesn't."

Elrond told how, about ten years after the Elven Rings were forged, Gil-galad had a waking dream about a burning mountain. He could see the flames more clearly than he could see the room he was standing in. Worse, he felt like something wicked had gotten inside his head, and was probing his thoughts. He yanked off the blue-stoned Ring and the feeling stopped.

Elrond inherited it from Gil-galad. He hesitated to try it on, but discovered that, unless Sauron was wearing the One, the Elven Ring was perfectly safe.

Saruman looked around the room. All three of the bearers of the Elven rings were here, Elrond, Círdan, and Galadriel. And each one of them wore an Elven ring.

"But if he doesn't have the Ring, how do you explain his strength without the Ring? He's crippled without it," said Saruman.

"I don't think it's Sauron," said Elrond. "He doesn't act like him."

Elrond was right, Saruman thought. He wasn't acting like Sauron. When Gandalf attacked Dol Guldur, he left without a fight. That wasn't like him. Sauron was a fighter. And when he fled, he didn't go to the places Sauron would have gone. Sauron should have turned up in Minas Morgul, but he didn't. Or he would have fled to his bolt hole of last resort, his Eastern Fortress. But the encircling flames were cold, the fortress abandoned.

Saruman could explain all that away. But something else bothered him. He couldn't understand why the Nazgûl showed no interest in the Necromancer. The Witch King never went to Dol Guldur. And no messengers were ever seen traveling between Dol Guldur and the Nazgûl strongholds at Carn Dum or Minas Morgul.

Saruman didn't know what to think. "Yavanna told us the Shadow in Mirkwood was Sauron," he said.

"Yavanna said she thought the Shadow in Mirkwood was Sauron. She was just expressing an opinion," said Radagast.



## The White Council

Maybe they had it wrong. Sauron wasn't the only rebellious Maia out there. What if another of Morgoth's people had survived the end of the First Age?

Saruman tried to remember the names of Morgoth's other Maiar. Kosomot<sup>9</sup>, Carcharoth, Draugluin, Thuringwethil. The ones who surrendered were still in prison. But suppose someone, presumed dead, had taken form again?

"Do we know what ever happened to Thuringwethil or Draugluin?" asked Saruman.

"I think they're in the Void," said Radagast.

All of the Istari believed the Necromancer was a renegade Maia. However, the Elves thought he was one of the Nazgûl. Saruman tried to tell them no Nazgûl could project that kind of presence, except for the Witch King.

"Ever since he reappeared, we've known where the Chief of the Nazgûl is, and we've never seen him go anywhere near Dol Guldur," said Gandalf.

They agreed it wasn't the Witch King. He hadn't left Minas Morgul since he and his followers captured it four hundred years before. And at least five other Nazgûl were at Minas Morgul with him.

"I'm not talking about the Witch King. I'm talking about the second Chief of the Nazgûl, Khamûl the Easterling. He and his followers are still unaccounted for," said Celeborn.

"Why wouldn't all nine of them be together in Minas Morgul?"

"With their Master gone, I imagine the Nazgûl split into two separate groups, one under each Captain."

"Why? There's strength in numbers, and the Nazgûl have always worked together in the past."

The two Captains, the Witch King of Angmar and Khamûl the Easterling were bitter rivals. Sauron made no secret that the Witch King was his favorite. He made the Witch King Regent while he was held hostage in Númenor. Plus, the two Captains had very different personalities. The Witch King was a great general who favors brute force, just like his Master. Khamûl, a

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<sup>9</sup> Kosomot = Gothmog

## Saruman's Journey

Ranger in life, preferred finesse and stealth. They seldom saw eye to eye.

"I think the Necromancer of Dol Guldur is the second Nazgûl Captain, Khamûl the Easterling."

"How do you explain the increased strength?" asked Saruman.

"Sometime after he fled Dol Guldur, he met up with his followers. With their help, he returned to Mirkwood and reoccupied the fortress. The increased presence we're seeing is three Nazgûl, where there used to be only one."

"Well, we've never seen the Necromancer, so we don't know who he is," said Saruman.

"There's one way to find out. I want to go into Dol Guldur again, and try to get a look at him," said Gandalf.

## Chapter 10 The Last Known Location



If he got anything from the meeting of the White Council, it was a determination to find the Ring and keep it out of Sauron's hands. He wished they'd done it earlier, but at least, after that scare, he had a second chance.

When they found it, he would recommend that they send it over the sea. Aulë would know how to unmake it, if anybody did.

Except Aulë wouldn't do it, Saruman realized. If the Ring were unmade, Sauron would surely be crippled, and he might even die. Aulë was a strict disciplinarian. He had hands like iron. He would, on occasion, take off his belt and beat one of them until he couldn't stand up, but he'd never hurt any of them. Saruman couldn't imagine any circumstance where Aulë would harm Sauron.



Saruman sat at a table in the Library in Minas Tirith, reading an ancient scroll. Everything from the collection in Osgiliath was here. Or to be exact, what was left of the collection was here.

During the civil war known as the Kinstrife, most of Osgiliath was destroyed by fire. The Dome of Stars collapsed, and the huge Palantir it housed fell into the river and was lost. When the building burned, the contents of the library were consumed by fire or buried under the rubble. They rescued what they could and moved it to the Library in Minas Tirith.

Saruman thought he'd read every scroll in Osgiliath pertaining to Sauron and the Ring. But the relocation to Minas

Tirith brought to light several ancient scrolls which otherwise would have remained filed away and forgotten, had not the collection been turned upside down by the move. He was reading one of them now.

The scroll described the Disaster in the Gladden Fields, where Isildur met his end. One of the few survivors wrote of how Isildur's party clashed with orcs on the eastern bank. Isildur had the Ring, and tried to swim across the Anduin river with it. He was killed by orcs just before he reached the western shore. His body sank in the marshy area where the Gladden River meets the Anduin.

The eye witness accounts, over two thousand years old, were as vivid as if they happened yesterday.

But although they told the story of how Isildur was killed, they said where he fell only in the most general terms. It was dark, and he was in the water, a considerable distance away. Furthermore, after he died, the current might have carried his body downstream. Or the river itself might have changed course in the centuries since it happened. The Ring could be underneath a meadow of tall grasses now, for all he knew.

Saruman considered what it meant. The Ring had been lost in the Gladden Fields, and that was the last anyone had heard of it.

Saruman thought of other treasures lost in the river. The Palantir of Osgiliath was on the bed of the Anduin under the Romendacil Bridge. But even though they knew exactly where it was, it couldn't be recovered. The Ring, on the other hand, was small and easily swept away. It gave him a sense of how unlikely it was that it would ever be found.

He wished he could look into the Palantir of Osgiliath just one more time. Maybe it could tell him where the Ring was.

## Chapter 11 The Palantir of Orthanc



Saruman was sitting in the archives at Minas Tirith. He was reading a scroll that described the tower of Orthanc. Although Orthanc was in Rohan, it belonged to Gondor. It was built as an astrological observatory, the reason Saruman was interested initially. But he just learned it once housed a Palantir, a seeing stone.

The men of Gondor stopped using the Palantiri when the Ithil Stone, the Palantir of Minas Ithil, was captured by Nazgûl. That was centuries ago, when Gondor still had a king. It was possible the Men of Gondor had forgotten Orthanc had a Palantir, and accidentally left it behind when they abandoned the tower.

Ever since he'd looked into the Palantir at Osgiliath, Saruman had wanted a Palantir. Much of his work in Arda involved searching. Searching for the places where evil things hid, searching for stories that had never been written down, searching for the Ring.

The Palantir might be able to tell him what happened to the Ring. It might have been washed out to sea. It might be buried in the earth somewhere, waiting for a farmer's plow to bring it to the surface. Or it might be sitting in a display case in a second-rate pawnshop somewhere. Either way, it would be nice to know what happened to it.

Saruman's personal belief was that the Ring had been passed down as an heirloom in Isildur's line, and had never been removed from the gold case that Isildur once wore on a chain around his neck.

No one knew where Isildur's decedents were now, but

probably they lived somewhere in Arnor, in the North.

He approached the Steward of Gondor, with whom he was on good terms, and offered to look after the tower for him. Saruman could be very persuasive, and his argument was reasonable, so the Steward gave him the keys to Orthanc in return for maintaining the tower and making repairs as needed.



Saruman fit the key into the lock. It turned with difficulty, but it did turn. Saruman shouldered the door to force it open. The tower had been abandoned for generations. There was a layer of leaves on the floor. A few of them were caught in the cobwebs that were everywhere. There was evidence of mice and bats, as well. The smell of damp was overwhelming.

Until now, he'd been living in Rhosgobel, Osgiliath, or Imladris, and then moving on. It would be nice to have a fixed address for once.

He started to explore his tower. In the highest chamber, just below the deck from which to observe the stars, he found a stone pedestal covered with a square of canvas. He lifted a corner of the cloth and dropped it right away. The Palantir was still here.

He didn't try to use it right away. Palantiri are powerful, and it would be unwise to go barging in without knowing what he was doing. On his next trip to Minas Tirith, he would search through the archives again to learn what he could about using a Palantiri.



Saruman made a trip to Minas Tirith a few weeks later. He met with the Steward to describe the repairs he'd made to Orthanc. After that, he had the rest of the day to himself. He went down to the archives to see what he could learn about using the Palantir.

He sat at his favorite table, surrounded by scrolls. He read that when the Ithil Stone was captured, Tar-Eärnur, Last King of Gondor, stopped using the Palantir in Minas Tirith, and

## The Palantir of Orthanc

ordered all the other Palantiri to be abandoned. Centuries later, fear of the Ithil Stone kept the Palantiri unused.

*Perhaps Tar-Eärnur was a particularly cautious or timid man,* Saruman thought.

But then he remembered that Tar-Eärnur was the one who went to Minas Morgul alone, to meet the Witch King in single combat. He walked into a trap. They never learned what happened to him.

*No, whatever else you say about him, he wasn't timid.*

Only the Palantir of Elendil, the Elostirion stone, was still safe to use. It looked across the sea into the Uttermost West, and communicated with no other stones.

Saruman wondered why, if the Palantiri were made by Fëanor, the Men of Gondor had them now. He learned they had been a gift to Elendil in Númenor from the Elves. Many more Palantiri remained with the Elves.

The next time he visited Imladris, he asked Elrond if the Elves still used their stones. Elrond said they did. None of the Elves had encountered the Ithil Stone, as far as he knew.

Saruman considered what he'd learned. As far as he could tell, the Ithil Stone had not been used since its capture. But even so, he didn't want to risk having someone using the Ithil Stone eavesdrop on what he was doing. He was searching for news of the Ring, and he didn't want anyone to watch him doing it.

He'd have to understand the stones thoroughly, and put safeguards in place, before he used his Palantir.

It might be as simple as getting in and out quickly, or using the Palantir only in the hours before dawn, when everyone else with a Palantir was asleep. The Palantir was useable. It was just a matter of being careful.



It was not yet five in the morning, and the eastern sky was showing only the slightest traces of grey. He wanted to keep his viewing time to a minimum, so before he went on, he chose the question he would ask, *Where are the evil things hiding?*

## Saruman's Journey

He took a deep breath, and pulled the canvas off the stone. He saw nothing at first. He waited. He was about to turn away, when he noticed a glow at the center of the orb as an image started to form. He saw a pool, a cliff wall, and holly trees. Not much in itself, but thrilling because it was a Palantir image.

Saruman had resolved not to stay on too long, so after just a few minutes, he reluctantly replaced the canvas.



Soon Saruman was using the Palantir regularly. A few hours before dawn, he pulled the canvas off the Stone. He'd used it half a dozen times, but always before dawn, and always for just a few minutes at a time. He didn't think he'd get into trouble because he was being careful.

At first, he looked at whatever images the Palantir chose to show him. With practice, he learned to exert his will and bring up the images he was looking for. Sometimes the image came up right way, but more often, he had to stare into the orb and sift through whatever it chose to show him.

He wanted to find out what happened to the Ring after Isildur swam across the Anduin with it. Sometimes he saw an image of the Gladden Fields, faint and far away, but it usually wasn't clear enough to tell him anything.



## Chapter 12 Essays in the Craft



Some time after he got settled into his new home, Saruman began to unpack the trunks and boxes he brought with him from Lothlorian.

He opened a small iron-bound trunk and saw that it contained the notes he took in Osgiliath when he was studying the Ways of the Enemy. He lifted out stacks of papers and thick sheaves of parchment, folded into bundles tied shut with red archivist's tape.

One bundle was so old, the color of the tape had faded almost completely away. These must be the notes he took in the library of Osgiliath, when he first began studying Sauron's deeds in the Second Age. The Library of Osgiliath was burned during the Kinstrife, and many of the scrolls in the archives were lost forever, except for what part of them he'd copied down. Of all his notes, these were the most precious.

Saruman loosened the knots and unfolded the parchment sheets with great care. He read, in his own handwriting, of the wars in the Second Age. There was also an analysis of Sauron's character, and speculation about what he might do in certain circumstances. However, since Sauron wasn't around anymore, the information was no longer interesting. Disappointed, Saruman re-tied the bundle and set it aside.

He opened another bundle and read a few pages. These were the notes he'd taken at Imladris when he'd interviewed Sauron's old apprentice the one who'd watched him forge the Great Rings. At the time, his interest in Ringlore was limited to wanting to know how much the Ring had increased Sauron's power, and how much the act of making it had weakened him.

But as he reread the notes he took at Imladris, it occurred to him that an understanding of Ringlore might be more important than he'd realized it first. Sauron's apprentice had offered at least a thread of hope that the Elven rings could be unbound from the One. If that were true, the rest of the Great Rings might be as well.

Saruman put the bundles back in the chest and shut the lid. He needed time to think.

A day later, surrounded by countless balls of parchment littering the flagstones and hearth, he concluded that it wouldn't be possible to unbind the Three without having physical possession of the One.

He didn't want to believe it. He had no access to the One. He did have access to the Three, however. All of the Elven Rings were in the same room whenever the White Council met.

He would study binding mechanisms more deeply. It was possible that, if he understood how they were bound, he could free the Elven rings from Sauron's influence.

Saruman would make a few simple rings that mimicked the binding mechanism of the Great Rings, and another ring, their inverse, to bind them. If it worked, it would help him understand the latch and socket mechanism of the enchantment. Saruman didn't have the power Sauron had, but he was more skilled. He would figure out how the latching mechanism worked, and then he would unlatch the Elven rings.

Saruman cleared off a long table in the largest chamber at Orthanc and got to work. After starting over a dozen times, he managed to make a latching mechanism small enough to fit inside a ring. There wasn't room left over for any other mechanism, but no matter.

In preparation for the next stage of his experiment, Saruman built himself a forge. He could do that, now that he had a permanent place to live. He realized that he had wanted one for a long time, it made him feel more at home.

After mastering the theory behind Ringlore, given that he had to work from incomplete and contradictory information,

making his design would be easy, little more than melting the gold and chanting a few spells over it as it cooled. But when he fired up the forge and began working, he discovered that drafting an elegant design and making something that actually worked were two different things.

It took a number of tries, but finally he produced two practice rings, exactly alike, each of which housed the binding mechanism.

If the binding spell worked, the rings would get heavier. Saruman brought them over to the jeweler's scale and added weights until the arm was exactly level. When they latched, the pan would sink.

Next, he forged the binding ring. It was even harder to make than the first two. He took a dozen tries before he even got the socket mechanism to form. But finally one of the binding rings turned out as intended, with all its parts well-formed.

As it cooled, he sang the binding spell over it. He looked across the room. The scale remained stubbornly level.

*The rings were built to connect with the binding ring. Why didn't they latch?*

He dumped the failed binding ring in the crucible where it floated on the surface of the molten gold for a moment, then grew soft and melted.

He tried again. This time, the scale quavered slightly, then returned to level. He scrapped the second binding ring and remade it.

On his fifth serious attempt, when he sang the spell, the scale tipped and the pan hit the workbench with a thunk.

It occurred to him later, that if someone put their own power into the binding ring, it would have to work on the first try. He felt an unexpected glimmer of respect for Sauron's workmanship. *He must be an accomplished technician, to have pulled it off on the first try.*

Now that Saruman had bound the rings, it was time to unbind them. He understood the mechanism, he was doing everything right, but they remained stubbornly latched together. After many attempts, he decided the apprentice was

right. No matter what he did, he wasn't going to be able to free the Elven rings.

He let the forge go cold, then collected armloads of or scratched out drawings and burned them in the hearth.

But later, when he'd gotten over the first sting of disappointment, he went back to the forge to look at his practice rings. There were just models, little more than toys. Even so, when he put the binding ring on his finger, he felt something. For the first time, he thought he might like to try on Sauron's Ring, just for a minute or two, to see how it felt.

**Exposed**

## Chapter 13 The Identity of the Necromancer



andalf moved through the woods with extreme caution. It was rough going because the hill was steep, and he had to fight his way through a dense growth of brambles.

He reviewed what he knew. The Istari came to Arda to contain the Presence in Southern Mirkwood, which they were told was Sauron taken form again. Radagast identified the Necromancer as the source of the Presence.

After a while, the rest of the White Council came to believe the Presence was a Nazgûl. The Witch King reappeared, but settled in Minas Morgul. As far as anyone could tell, he never went to Dol Guldur. Gandalf was the only one who still thought it might be Sauron.

The others decided the Necromancer was, in fact, Khamûl the Easterling. Gandalf hoped so. He was afraid of Sauron.

Gandalf was determined to locate the Presence that occupied this place, and see for himself what it was. His plan was to get as close as possible, and observe from a position of safety without being seen himself.

But even if Sauron wasn't here, Nazgûl are dangerous too. Gandalf had no desire to meet one face to face, especially not on its home territory where its strength was greatest.



Gandalf studied the fortress from his hiding place at the edge of the woods. He could only see it in silhouette, black against the orange pink light in the eastern horizon, but he

could tell that a second curtain wall had been built around the original, doubling the size of the original structure and extending the south face of the hill.

He came in the same way he came in before, through the mining tunnel abandoned by the dwarves before Dol Guldur was built. The entrance had begun to collapse, but the tunnel inside was in good condition.

He noticed something he hadn't been away of the first time; the dwarven tunnels had side branches that lead off in different directions. He followed two or three of them, leading in the general direction of the newer part of the fortress where he guessed the dungeons were, to dead ends, but finally found one that opened into the back of a storeroom near a guard chamber. The cells of the prison were nearby.

Gandalf found Thráin in his cell, and took the map and key from him for safekeeping.

But that wasn't why he'd come. He was here to identify the Presence that dwelt in Dol Guldur, eight hundred years after his failed first attempt. But this time, he knew his way around the fortress, and moved through it with confidence.

His plan was to explore the vaults and corridors of Dol Guldur, the dungeons, guard rooms, and kitchens. He would try to be as invisible as possible, eavesdropping on the conversations of kitchen servants and guard captains, learning as much as possible.

The kitchens were never empty at this time of day. He was taking a risk by being there. He didn't know who the Necromancer was, but he hoped to find out by eavesdropping on the servants' conversations. At some point, one of them was bound to say their Master's name.

He concealed himself behind a pantry cupboard and waited.

Pretty soon, he heard footsteps and flattened himself against the wall in the shadows behind the cupboard. The footsteps stopped, and he heard the rattle of a heavy tray being set down.

"It's funny about waiting at table. It's like we're invisible. I sometimes think they forget we're there," a young woman said.

"They do forget. And they don't realize we eavesdrop on them all the time," an older woman answered her.

"Shall I be the one to tell them?"

"And get yourself sacked?"

"Not me. My Mum relies on my wages. She's a widow, and my brothers and sister are still small."

"Just keep your head down and do your job, girl. You didn't see nothing, you didn't hear nothing."

"Do you want to know what they said in there?" the young woman asked.

"No, but I'm sure you'll tell me," the older one replied.

"I overheard something that could make us all rich! They said they would pay gold for News of the One."

"The One what?"

"That I don't know. It's not like I could admit to listening and ask them. A pity, that. I sure could use some of that gold."

"Except you don't have News of the One. You hardly ever leave the village."

"And I don't know any Isildur, either. They're looking for him, too."

"He knows where it is, then?"

The maidservants' voices receded into the next room, and Gandalf slipped out of his hiding place. As they left, Gandalf caught a glimpse of them. He was surprised to see that both women were orcs.

Gandalf knew it was unlikely he'd find what he was looking for in the utilitarian parts of the fortress. He needed to find the formal spaces, the receiving rooms, council chambers, and living quarters of the nobility.

Behind the kitchens, he found the passageway the serving maid with the tray must have used. It took him to a wide corridor he recognized from his first visit. It would lead him to the part of the fortress he was looking for.



Until now, all the passageways he'd explored were tunnels cut from the living rock, their walls as rough as the sides of boulders. Rushes jammed into cracks in the rock provided the only light.

This corridor had smooth walls, faced in stone blocks carefully fitted together. It was lit by torches supported by decorative ironwork. Gandalf noted the width of the corridor, the height of its ceiling, the fine workmanship. This was the part of the fortress occupied by the nobility. Gandalf moved down the corridor cautiously, pausing every few steps to flatten himself against the wall and listen.

The corridor led to a pair of arched doors covered with ornamental ironwork. One of them was ajar, letting candlelight from the room spill into the corridor.

Through the open door, Gandalf saw a barrel vaulted room dominated by a long table and a dozen high backed chairs. It had a painted ceiling, and the far wall was hung with tapestries. Inside, he could hear the low murmur of voices, but he couldn't make out the words.

He pressed himself against the wall behind the open door and moved closer. He tried to look into the room through the gap behind the door and the wall. He could only see a sliver of the room at a time, so he moved his head back and forth very carefully, trying to piece together a larger scene.

He saw two or three figures in black standing near the middle of the table, their backs to him. He felt their presence, heavy and cold, and utterly menacing.

"All right then, I'll deal with it," one of them said to the others.

He turned around, and Gandalf got a good look at him. A Nazgûl.

The creature moved toward the door. His walk was fluid and graceful, like a deer. Gandalf knew that one of the Nine had been a Ranger in life, a stalker and tracker. Of all of them, this one was the most likely to discover Gandalf's hiding place. He held his breath and waited, his mouth dry.

The Nazgûl pushed the door open wider and slipped

through the opening. The Nazgûl didn't bump Gandalf with the door, and he didn't turn around to shut the door behind himself. Gandalf was afraid one of the others would call him and make him look back, but they didn't, and the danger passed.

Gandalf knew that Nazgûl could often be found together. Half a dozen of them occupied Minas Morgul right now. The Witch King had been alone in Angmar at Carn Dûm, but that was unusual. Gandalf guessed that the others two black-robed figures were Nazgûl as well, but he needed to get a good look at them to be sure.

Now that the door was open wider than before, the gap on the hinge side was wider too, which gave him a better view. He moved as close as he dared, and found he could see the whole room at once. For some reason, he thought of Eönwë, herald of Manwë. He pushed the thought away and focused on what he needed to do right now.

The two figures he'd seen earlier were still there, standing near the table with their backs to him. Gandalf saw what he'd missed before. There was another person in the room, seated at the table. He was barely visible because the others were standing in front of him.

Gandalf thought he could just make out the edge of a hood and the hem of a sleeve, but they were all wearing black, so it was hard to be sure.

Gandalf heard the murmur of conversation, laughter, and the scraping of a chair as it was pushed back. He watched as the seated figure rose to his feet. He was taller than the others by half a head. He began to speak to one of the others, but he paused, as if listening to something.

The figure turned around slowly, scanning the room until his eye fell on the spot where Gandalf was hiding. Gandalf never took his eyes off him. That was a mistake. Without meaning to, Gandalf made eye contact with him through the gap between the door and the wall.

## The Identity of the Necromancer

They recognized each other in the same instant. Gandalf saw him clap a hand over his mouth, his eyes wide with shock.

Gandalf slammed the door and sealed it with the strongest spell he knew, then took off running. Terrible sounds pursued him, cursing, screaming, and the sounds of violence being done to the door. He knew it couldn't hold for long, so he collapsed the roof of the corridor.

Coughing from stone dust, he made for the nearest way out. Already he could hear the shouting of orders and the footfalls of soldiers running in all directions, but by taking the servants passageway, he was able to evade them.

He sprinted through the kitchens at a dead run and lunged for the entrance to the root cellar. A kitchen maid screamed, and there was a crash as a bowl shattered on the paving stones. He jumped down the half flight of steps. His knees hit the dirt floor, hard. He was back on his feet in an instant, and ran without stopping until he was through the tunnel and safe outside, deep among the trees.

He looked back at the fortress and shivered. Now he knew.

## Chapter 14 The Deception of Saruman



he entire White Council assembled to learn what Gandalf saw inside Dol Guldur.

"I saw Sauron Gorthaur," Gandalf said.

There was a murmur around the table, and the hiss of indrawn breath. But Saruman wasn't convinced.

"If it was Sauron, you'd have sensed his presence. But you didn't. You didn't identify him until you saw him," said Saruman.

"I did sense his presence, but I mistook him for Eönwë," said Gandalf.

There was a snort, and everyone around the table started laughing. Sauron and Eönwë were as different as light and darkness. Saruman wasn't laughing, though. He couldn't tell Sauron and Eönwë apart by their presence either, and he grew up with Sauron.

"How can you be sure it was him? You only saw him for a second before you turned and ran, and by your own admission, you barely know him," said Saruman.

"He was little more than arm's reach away when we made eye contact. I think we recognized each other in the same instant," said Gandalf.

"What makes you think he recognized you?" asked Saruman.

"When I started running, he screamed my name, Olórin. Not Gandalf or Mithrandir or any of the other names I use in Arda. The name he would have called me in Valinor," said Gandalf.

Everyone around the table started talking at once. So now they knew. The Necromancer was Sauron, after all.

## The Deception of Saruman

Saruman leaned back in his chair. There was a roaring in his ears and he thought he might faint. He drew a few deep breaths to steady himself.

His brother apprentice, presumed dead, grieved for and gotten over, had been found alive. Saruman should feel relief, but he didn't. He felt something like fear, quickly turning to rage.

When Sauron was gone, things started going well for Saruman. He became Aulë's most senior Maia. Aulë began to pay attention to him. Then he was chosen to lead the Istari, and was named Head of the White Council.

For the first time in his life, he felt important. He felt like he mattered. But with Sauron back in the picture, Saruman would lose all the attention he was getting when it shifted back to the renegade Maia. Unless he did something dramatic to put it back on himself.

*I will find the Ring, and the White Council will call me a hero.*

Saruman reviewed what he knew about the Ring.

Isildur had it when he left Gondor. He carried it in a gold case on a chain around his neck. He couldn't touch it because it burned him, but he liked to keep it on his person.

He and his two older sons were going home to Arnor to rejoin his wife and youngest son after the War of the Last Alliance. He made the trip with a group of men-at-arms, even though the journey wasn't thought to be dangerous. They should have reached Arnor in forty days, but they never got there. Both the heirlooms he carried, his crown and the Ring, were lost with him.

The more Saruman thought about the Ring, the more he became anxious about it falling into the wrong hands. Any minor chieftain or warlord who found the Ring could quickly become a major tyrant.

If someone had found it and used it, it would extend their life and give them great power. But they knew of no warlord who wielded unusual power and measured his age in centuries. That kind of thing attracts attention. Since they

hadn't heard anything, Saruman was sure the Ring was still lost.

The White Council would have to find the Ring, he decided. And once they did, they'd have to lock it up safely, to prevent anyone else from using it.

Saruman suggested the Ring should go into the vaults in Minas Tirith, and never come out again. Galadriel thought Imladris would be a good choice. Elrond thought Lindon would be better, because a ship could carry the Ring from the Grey Havens to the Uttermost West where Sauron couldn't follow.

"I don't question that the Ring could be locked up in any of those places, I just wonder how long it would stay locked up," said Gandalf.

"Sauron had never breached any of those strongholds," said Saruman.

"I'm not talking about Sauron. I'm talking about resisting temptation," said Gandalf.

Of course, before they locked it up, they had to find it. And now that he knew Sauron was in Dol Guldur, close to the Gladden Fields, he felt under tremendous pressure to find it before Sauron did.

Something was bothering him. Sauron has lived near the Gladden Fields for almost four hundred years, but hadn't begun to search them. Couldn't he sense its presence? Why didn't he call to it and make it show itself?

*And when it does show itself, I'm the one who's going to find it,* Saruman thought.

Gandalf addressed the group. "We need to attack Dol Guldur and drive Sauron out. Immediately."

Voices around the table were raised in agreement.

Saruman rose to speak. "Remember our mission. We are forbidden to engage Sauron directly."

"But he's asking about the Ring, and Isildur's heir," said Gandalf.

"He's just asking. He doesn't even know the Ring was lost in the Gladden Fields," said Saruman.

## The Deception of Saruman

“Besides, if we drove him out of Dol Guldur, he’d just go to Minas Morgul. He’d be closer to Gondor than he is now,” said Elrond. “What’s more, the Ithil Stone is in Minas Morgul. You’re worried about encountering a Nazgûl in the Ithil Stone? From now on, Sauron’s the one you’ll face.”

“It would be better if Sauron stays where he is,” Radagast said.

On the way out, Gandalf pulled Saruman aside.

“We are forbidden to engage Sauron directly,” he said, exasperated.

“You heard Manwë. We’re not to meet power with power, we’re to advise and encourage,” Saruman replied.

“But this is an emergency!” Gandalf was furious. “The Ring was lost in the Gladden Fields. Sauron is nearby. His presence will encourage the Ring to show itself. It wants to be found.”

“But Sauron doesn’t know it’s there. He’s not looking for it,” said Saruman.

*But I am. And if I’m going to find it, it’s absolutely necessary that Sauron stay right where he is,* thought Saruman.

Gandalf gave him a look that Saruman couldn’t read. He blew a large smoke ring, then a number of smaller ones following it. He stretched out his arm and closed his hand around them. They fell apart and vanished.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales. The Hunt for the Ring.*

## Chapter 15 The Gladden Fields



nce Saruman knew Sauron was in Dol Guldur, he began to search for the Ring with an intensity approaching panic. They had to find the Ring before Sauron did.

Yet Sauron didn't know the Ring was nearby, and didn't appear to be looking for it.

Sauron returned almost four hundred years ago, Saruman reminded himself. That's a lot of time for a magical object to work its way out of the mud and sit on the surface with the current flowing over it, waiting to be found.

*I'm surprised he hasn't found it already. I wonder why not.*

Sauron must not find the Ring. If he did, they would have the horrors of the Second Age all over again, and the Free People would have lost.

The White Council must find it first. Saruman would enlist the aid of the entire Council to look for it.

But suppose one of the others found it first, and claimed it as his own?

Saruman didn't think it should be claimed. To claim it meant wresting control away from Sauron and becoming its new Master. It put too much power in the hands of one person. Besides, the Ring was toxic.

Saruman decided to search for it on his own. If all went well, he would find it and lock it up in a vault at Minas Tirith. It would be safe there, but still available if they needed it.

Then he would call a meeting of the White Council and tell them what he'd done. He'd be a hero. Even Gandalf and Galadriel would have to admire him for that.



## The Gladden Fields

Saruman had hiked through the Gladden Fields in the past, but he'd never searched them in a methodical way. It occurred to him that if the Ring drew unwholesome things to itself, he might find it by looking for places that seemed more foul than usual. He decided to do a detailed survey, taking careful notes and recording everything he learned on a map.

He sent servants into the marshes and riverbanks, with instructions to note the places where poisonous plants and mushrooms grew. He also wanted to know where leeches and mosquitoes were particularly bad, or where marsh gasses bubbled from rot beneath the surface, and where stagnant water was choked with slime and mats of algae.

He asked them to draw sketches of the riverbanks, as well. If they were clothed with unhealthy things like thorn bushes, thistles, and poison ivy, he wanted to know that too.

There was so much ground to cover, he asked Radagast for help. But while Radagast's birds did find a few concentrations of poisonous plants, there was no one area that stood out.

Finally the survey was complete. But when he unrolled the finished map, nothing said 'Here is a place where the evil things are.' He rolled up the map with a sigh. Perhaps he would try the eastern bank next.



Saruman believed, if he was patient and put in enough hours, the Palantir would show him where the Ring was.

It had been his policy to use the Palantir only in the small hours of the night, and only for a short time. But it wasn't long before his Palantir use became excessive.

The trouble was, the Palantir of Orthanc didn't behave like the huge Palantir of Osgiliath. Saruman could steer the Osgiliath Palantir easily. He could sometimes steer his smaller, less powerful Palantir, but it took an exertion of will that left him exhausted.

In the end, it was easier to spend long hours watching random images scroll by, and wait for the images he wanted to

see. He saw amazing things, the Disaster of the Gladden Fields, the Battle of the Last Alliance, Celebrimbor's workshop. But so far, he hadn't seen the Ring.

The search of the Gladden Fields was taking over his life. He spent hours looking into the orb, hoping to see beneath the surface of the Anduin, looking at gravel and mud and weeds.

Once, he sat down in front of the Palantir in the hours before dawn, and had such a good run that he forgot to eat or even get up and stretch. Before he knew it, he'd been staring into it for almost fourteen hours.

*One more image, one more image after that.*

He couldn't stop. At some level, he knew he was losing control. But he didn't want to cut back.

If his fellow Istari knew, they would tell him to stop. He didn't want to stop. He just wanted to cut back enough that he could stop lying and being secretive about it.

## Chapter 16 The Spies of the Enemy



Saruman sent his agents to visit taverns far up and down the banks of the Anduin. He had them visit all the ones he'd visited earlier as well as new ones, to make inquiries about magic rings. He also had them visit the east bank, which he hadn't investigated before.

Saruman wondered if he was getting sloppy with his record-keeping. An agent sent into a town they hadn't visited yet, at least he thought they hadn't, reported that one of the people he talked to balked, saying, 'Weren't you just here last week, asking me all those same questions?'



Saruman was sitting in a tavern at the end of the day in a little town near the Anduin. He was tired and out of sorts.

He had spent yet another long day hiking through the marshland near the Gladden Fields, but all he had to show for it was sunburn and mosquito bites. One of them started to itch. He tried not to scratch it, because he knew it would only make all the other ones near it start to itch, too.

The tavern was crowded, and there were only a few empty chairs left. A well-mannered stranger sat down in the chair next to his.

"You look like you've had a rough day. May I get you a pint of ale? My treat."

Saruman found himself liking the man.

"Actually, I have an ulterior motive. Most of the patrons in this tavern are simple rustics. You and I are the only educated

people in here, and I feel the need for intelligent conversation.”

Saruman found himself telling the stranger about his day, with all its irritations and hardships. The man listened attentively, and nodded.

Saruman began to relax, partly due to the pleasant conversation and partly because he was on at least his second pint of ale.

The man told several amusing anecdotes. Then he added, “I’ve traveled all over., and once I heard a story about a magic ring that can make you invisible. Have you ever heard of such a thing?”

Saruman replied, “Oh, I can top that. Invisibility is just the beginning of it. I know of rings that can ...”

Then he stopped himself. That was almost exactly the way he asked local people if they’d heard of a magic ring in the neighborhood.

Saruman clenched his teeth. So now he knew. The servants of Sauron were searching the Gladden Fields. Sauron must have learned of Isildur’s end and the Disaster in the Gladden Fields.

Saruman realized, now that Sauron was searching, the game had just changed.

He stood up to go, furious for having played the fool, and turned to face the man. “I have a message for your Master. ‘Tell Mairon that Curumo says hi.’<sup>11</sup> He’ll know what it means,” Saruman said sarcastically.

Because Saruman looked into the Palantir so often, he happened to see something remarkable, right as it was happening.

He began looking into the Palantir before dawn, meaning to finish within fifteen minutes, but it was here it was mid-morning and he was still looking.

Saruman saw an image of the Disaster in the Gladden Fields. But it wasn’t dark and far away like images from the distant past usually are. It was bright and clear, as though it were happening right now.

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Tell Sauron that Saruman says ‘hi.’

## The Spies of the Enemy

Saruman watched as Isildur's men were overwhelmed when orcs swarmed over them and cut them down. Then a horn blew. Everybody froze attackers and defenders both.

New people entered the scene, people with scripts, people with surveying instruments, and people with clipboards. Saruman noticed the swords were made of wood and the arrow shafts were blunt and harmless.

Orcs of extreme age were consulted during these deliberations, and adjustments to positions were made based on their advice. Orcs came from Elves, so perhaps they could live for centuries, too. Saruman guessed these ones might be eyewitnesses to the original conflict.

After their positions were recorded, the players backed up to their original positions. The horn blew, and the action resumed.

Orthanc was not close to the Gladden Fields. Saruman rode hard for several days to reach the site. When he arrived, the reenactors were just getting started. The Palantir must have shown him an image from a few days in the future.

Saruman picked an observation post from which he could observe the action unseen. He watched four or five reenactments of Isildur's end.

Each time, a note taker recorded the spot where Isildur sank, which varied from one scenario to the next. The reenactors identified several spots where Isildur might have met his end and wrote them down on a clipboard.

Saruman had almost stopped paying attention, when there was a shout that carried across the water. One of the workman raised his arm above his head. The others stopped what they were doing and crowded around him. There was a lot of splashing as they pushed and shoved, trying to get close enough to see.

An official in fine clothes waded into the swamp. The crowd parted for him. He held out his hand, and the workman put something in it.

Saruman felt the color drain from his face. He could guess what was happening, and there wasn't a single thing he could do about it.

## Saruman's Journey

*No! It was supposed to be mine!*

Saruman realized what he's just said, and felt profoundly embarrassed.

*I mean, No, it must never fall into Sauron's hands.*

The crowd appeared to be breaking up. The reenactors were returning to their places. The horn blew, and the scenario resumed at the place where it had left off.

*False alarm.*

Saruman put his hand to his chest. It was a long time before his pulse returned to normal. He stayed in his perch until the reenactors packed up and left. When the last of them had gone, he headed for home himself, badly shaken. Sauron was getting way too close to the Ring. The White Council had to stop him.

# ***Driven Out***

## Chapter 17 The Attack on Dol Guldur



When the entire White Council was assembled, Saruman rose to speak. "Sauron is searching the Gladden Fields. He must have learned of Isildur's end." There was immediate and unanimous agreement about what they should do. Drive him from Dol Guldur.

Glorfindel, Elrond, and Círdan each offered their assistance. But Gandalf turned them down. "I'm afraid the Elves won't be able to help us. Saruman, Radagast, and I will have to do it alone," Gandalf said. His face was pale.

Círdan pulled the red-stoned Elven ring from his finger and gave it to Gandalf.<sup>12</sup> "The Elves can help you. Both with this, and by standing beside you when we attack," he said.

Saruman was furious. He couldn't believe Círdan gave his ring to Gandalf instead of himself, the Head of the Council, not to mention the expert in Ringlore best able to use it.

"There are three Istari getting ready to storm the fortress of Sauron, and three Elven rings. Círdan, thank you for lending yours to Gandalf, because he will need every bit of help for this dangerous mission, as will Radagast and I."

He waited for Elrond and Galadriel to offer their rings to Radagast and himself. Saruman looked at Galadriel, then Elrond. They looked away.

There was an awkward silence.

Finally Galadriel spoke. "Círdan, you endangered Lindon by

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<sup>12</sup> Círdan gave Gandalf his ring on the ship from Valinor to the Grey Havens, in TA 1050. I deviated from Canon in order to tempt Saruman with a ring, and then snatch it away.



giving your ring to Gandalf. That was irresponsible of you."

She went on to say that the Elven rings were created to slow the decay of beautiful places. The Three are the source of vitality to Lindon, Imladris, and Lothlorien. They don't increase personal power or strength in battle, and wouldn't help anyone to storm a citadel. Saruman couldn't believe Elrond and Galadriel could be that selfish.

As they got up to leave, Gandalf's manner toward Saruman was chilly. "Last time we met, you wouldn't let me use force against him. This time, you're my strongest supporter. What changed?" said Gandalf.

"Sauron is searching. He's getting way too close. We have to stop him before he finds it," said Saruman.

"Or perhaps you don't want him to find it before you do."

"None of us want him to find it first," said Saruman evenly.

"A word of advice. Don't plan on using it yourself," Gandalf said coldly.

As sincerely as possible, Saruman told Gandalf, "I'm only trying to find the Ring. I'm not planning to use it."



"I don't like spiders," said Glorfindel, pulling strands of white silk off his face.

"Then you shouldn't have come," said Saruman.

As head of the White Council, it was Saruman's place to lead the assault on Dol Guldur. He rode at the front of the column with the rest of the White Council followed him: Galadriel and Celeborn, Círdan the Shipwright, Elrond and his sons, Glorfindel, Thranduil, and the wizards Gandalf and Radagast. They rode along the narrow path in single file, grim-faced and heavily armed.

Mirkwood was full of spiders, but there were more of them than normal in the forest around Dol Guldur. Webs stretched between the tree trunks, some of them large enough to snare a man on horseback.

Saruman drew his sword and hacked at a web blocking their

way. The blade started to slice through the grey-white sheet but got caught in the filmy veil. He twisted it free with difficulty and tried to wipe the sticky substance off the blade

It wasn't just the spiders; evil things seemed to be drawn by the Necromancer's presence. Beside the path, thorn bushes grew in thick clumps, poisonous plants and mushrooms growing beneath them. The earth was damp underfoot; and the smell of mold filled the still air.

The path began to climb as they approached Amon Lanc the bald hill, a spur of bare rock that towered above the highest trees in Mirkwood. They came around a bend, and through a break in the trees had their first look at the fortress. It sat on the rocky summit like a broken crown, its roofs and pinnacles like spines. It was wreathed by a dark fog that seemed to be renewed as quickly as the wind blew it away.

Glorfindel broke the silence. "We don't really know who the Necromancer is, but I expect it's one of the Nazgûl. After all, Sauron fell almost three thousand years ago, and hasn't been seen since."

"I went into Dol Guldur and I saw him. The Necromancer is Sauron," said Gandalf.

"Would you have recognized him if you saw him? You said you barely knew him," said Glorfindel.

Gandalf had been here before; he said the road to Dol Guldur passed through a cluster of crudely-made stone cottages, populated almost entirely by orcs. The White Council would have to ride through a nest of them to reach the fortress.

Radagast sent a flock of crows to the Bald Hill. They flew over the curtain walls and circled the towers, cawing loudly, then whirled around and returned. Radagast held out his arm and a crow landed on it. He tilted his head toward the huge bird, listening. A second crow landed on him, and more settled on tree branches nearby. Radagast listened to them for a few minutes, and his eyes widened.

"They say the fortress is full of orcs, in mail or leather and metal armor, armed with scimitars and pikes. The tops of the

## The Attack on Dol Guldur

walls are crowded with orc archers, and the main gate is closed," said Radagast.

"They're expecting us. I wonder how they knew," said Saruman.

They pressed on. The narrow path threaded between tree trunks, almost all of them white with webs. Even though it was dawn, no birds sang. Their horses' hooves rang clotted against the damp earth, unnaturally loud in the stillness.

As they approached the village, they bunched their horses closer together and drew their weapons. Few were about at this hour. They passed a tavern, The Spider's Fang, where an orc stood in the doorway was sweeping the front step. She looked up at them and froze, her mouth open with surprise.

Beyond the village, the path climbed up the bare rock. They left the trees entirely; there wasn't a tree or shrub to shield them from view as they approached the Necromancer's stronghold. The hooves of their horses rang against the stones underfoot; there was no other sound except the wind.

The sky was clear down in the village, but up here, a black cloud over the fortress, dark and menacing; it thickened as they watched.

The air was wet, and it smelled unhealthy, like mildew or stagnant water. Saruman noticed that the stonework of the fortress, darker than the rock it sat on, was coated in mold. In places, hunks of it had come loose from the walls and hung like garlands.

Saruman looked at the top of the walls. Archers crowded along the top of the wall, bows raised and arrows notched. Saruman summoned up a violent wind, which whipped his hair and clothing and swept away the arrows the archers released.

Gandalf moved to the front. He raised his arm, kicked the flanks of his horse, and charged toward the gates of Dol Guldur. Saruman galloped after him, so did all the others. They fanned out in a line and rode twelve abreast, packed so close that Círdan's foot struck Saruman's and knocked it loose from the stirrup, but he had bigger things to worry about and let it

swing loose, unheeded.

A bell tolled, and Saruman heard the metallic clink-clink-clink of a ratchet lifting the drawbridge. Saruman spurred his horse to greater speed, but the drawbridge was already halfway up by the time they reached it. Saruman sang a spell in his mother tongue, and one of the chain's huge links ruptured with a pop. When the other chain failed, the drawbridge struck the earth so hard the boards splintered.

Saruman summoned a thunderstorm and called down bolt after bolt of lightning. The thunderclaps overhead were deafening. The highest tower was stuck, and blocks of stone flew through the air. Saruman watched until they disappeared behind the curtain wall. There was an enormous crash, and someone inside yelped.

The drawbridge had collapsed, but the gates were still closed and barred. Gandalf spoke the words of a spell and Saruman heard a low throbbing tone, more pressure than sound. His ears popped, and he felt a vibration in his body.

The gates bowed inward like the sides of a ship that struck a rock. The thick timbers began to split, and one of them gave way with a snap, leaving a hole wide enough for a man to squeeze through if he turned sideways.

Saruman looked through the hole into the courtyard, which was filled with orcs, armed and highly agitated. Gandalf sent a concussive blast through the space through the boards and raised his arm, the signal to storm the fortress. Saruman and the others followed him through the gap.

The Istari hit the orcs with everything they had, spells that knocked them off their feet, spells that caused confusion, spells that cramped the gut and dropped them to their knees, retching. Celeborn leaned over an orc curled up on the ground, clutching his midsection in agony.

"Where is your Master?" Celeborn demanded.

"They're gone. They rode out the back gate just as you came in the front."

## The Attack on Dol Guldur

Saruman noticed a postern gate across the courtyard from the main entry, wide enough for a single man on horseback, but no more.

“Shall we give chase?” said Glorfindel.

“No, let them go. We came here to drive him out, and we did that,” said Saruman.

The orcs were going to be knocked out for a while. Glorfindel stayed behind to administer incapacitating spells as needed, and the rest of them fanned out to search the fortress.

“I’m going to search the Keep,” said Saruman.

“Don’t go alone. You don’t know what’s waiting for you in there. Elladan and Elrohir, go with him,” said Elrond.

The Keep was easy to spot; it was the strongest and most massive structure in the fortress. Built on the peak of Amon Lank, it was also the tallest. The Keep was the bolt hole of last resort, the place the defenders would fall back to in times of desperation.

The three of them hiked up the steep courtyard to reach the Keep, in the furthest corner of the fortress, where the side wall met the back. There were other structures built against it, one large enough to be a Great Hall, but they were dwarfed by the massive tower, its square sides featureless save for arrow slits.

Saruman saw was a low, narrow door with a high sill leading into the Keep. The door stood wide open.

“Stay alert, and keep your weapons drawn,” said Saruman.

Elrond’s sons unsheathed their long, flexible swords.

Saruman ducked through the door and unfolded himself on the other side, in a narrow tunnel through the thickness of the wall. Elladan and Elrohir followed.

At the other end of the tunnel, they found themselves in a large, windowless chamber. It appeared to be a guard room; racks against the wall held scimitars and pikes, there were bunks for a dozen soldiers against the far wall, and a long table in the middle of the room held pewter plates and tankards.

In the far corner of the room, a ladder poked through a trap door. Saruman took one of the burning rushes from its iron

wall bracket and looked down into the hole: barrels, sacks, crates, and a well, a storage room.

He didn't see a way to reach the floors above, but on the way out, he saw what he missed before, an alcove in the side of the tunnel that contained a spiral stair built into the thickness of the wall. Elladan ran up the stairs with Elrohir on his heels, and Saruman followed.

On the next level, they found the officers' quarters. The room had whitewashed walls, arrow slit windows, and a small fireplace. There was a bedstead against one wall and two more against another.

They went up another level. At the next landing, the door to the room, its heavy timbers bound in iron, was closed. Saruman was going to break the lock, but the ironwork latch, shaped like a wolf's head, lifted at his touch.

Inside, they found a room lined with books. Several substantial chairs with arms were arranged near a large fireplace; there were tapestries on the walls and a richly colored rug on the floor. The walls were thinner up here, and the arrow slits were flanked by window seats built into the walls; an open book and a silver goblet were sitting on one of the stone seats. Apparently, the upper floors of the Keep, housed the living quarters of the nobility.

There was a table in the center of the room; on it, they saw a small casket on its side, its lid open. A thin gold coin was stuck in a crack between the box's side and bottom. A few coins were scattered on the table, and more of them lay on the floor.

"It looks like they dumped their gold on the table and shoveled handfuls of coins into pouches and pockets as fast as they could," said Elladan.

Or at least he assumed it was Elladan. Elrond's sons were twins; Saruman had never been able to tell them apart.

"And didn't have time to pick up the ones that fell to the floor. I've never been in that much of a hurry my whole life," said Elrohir.

"It looks like we surprised them; they couldn't get out of here fast enough," said Saruman.

## The Attack on Dol Guldur

The spiral stair went up another level. The door was standing open; from the hall, Saruman could see a stone fireplace and a miniature chandelier hanging from the ceiling, the candle holders shaped like the heads of dragons. A window looking out onto the courtyard was flanked by window seats.

Saruman stepped in the room with Elladan and Elrohir following him. The room was whitewashed and clean, but sparsely furnished with a table and chair and a simple bedstead covered with a wool blanket. Everything was neat and in good order, save where someone had rifled a clothes chest and dumped most of its contents on the floor.

"It looks like someone threw on traveling clothes in a hurry," said Elladan.

A nobleman's clothing lay discarded on the bed. The shirt and tunic had been stripped off together, leaving the inside-out shirt wrapped around the tunic. Saruman touched the shirt with the back of his hand. It was still warm.

"He would have packed a change of clothes, too, if he'd had time," said Elrohir.

An empty satchel lay at the foot of the bed, waiting to be packed. A stack of clothes, neatly folded, sat beside it. He saw woolen hose, a homespun shirt, and a leather gherkin, the clothes of a highwayman or ranger, not a nobleman.

Beside the clothes was a map. Saruman picked it up and unfolded it. No route was marked, but it showed all the roads between Dol Guldur and Minas Morgul, the Fortress of the Witch King. If Sauron had bolted from here, Minas Morgul was the most likely place he would go.

"There's one more level, should we keep looking?" said Elrohir, pointing to a ladder on the landing that led to the next level.

"No, I saw a spider web across the ladder. It hasn't been used in a while," said Saruman.

They went down three flights of steps and exited the Keep through the tunnel, and found Gandalf in the courtyard.

"The last time I was here, I found the ashes of burned papers everywhere I looked. But today, it appears they didn't have

time to burn anything," said Gandalf. He would have said more, but Glorfindel came running over.

"I want you to see something," he said.

Saruman and the others followed him to the stables.

"What do you see?" asked Glorfindel.

When his eyes adjusted to the dim light, Saruman counted eight stalls. There were horses in five of them. Most were dark brown or bay, colors favored by the Nazgûl. Looking around, he saw saddles, bridles on pegs, and a chest for grain. The usual number of barn cats wandered around.

"Only three horses are missing," said Glorfindel.

Saruman looked again. Glorfindel was right; three of the stalls were empty, their gates standing open.

"The way I remember the story, when Gandalf came here secretly, he saw three robed figures standing in front of a table, the three Nazgûl missing from Minas Morgul. Then he saw what might have been the edge of a sleeve. He concluded there was a fourth person sitting at the table, blocked from view by the others; Gandalf believed it was Sauron," said Glorfindel.

"But they only took three horses when they fled the fortress. That implies there were three Nazgûl here, not three Nazgûl and Sauron. Gandalf was wrong," said Celeborn.

Saruman thought of the discarded clothing in the bedroom upstairs, still warm to the touch. It occurred to him that Nazgûl, like all of the undead, are cold-blooded.

"Gandalf wasn't wrong," said Saruman.



## Chapter 18 The Return to Mordor



he attack on Dol Guldur was successful in that the White Council forced Sauron from his stronghold.

In retrospect, it would have been better to let Sauron remain where he was. In Dol Guldur, they could keep an eye on him. But after the White Council drove him out, they had no idea where he went.

After the attack, Gandalf and Celeborn made inquiries in every town along the road between Dol Guldur and Mordor, but except for an itinerant portrait painter and his wife, no one had been seen heading south.



As an experiment, Saruman willed the Palantir to show him what had become of Sauron. He watched as dark clouds swirled in the orb. He kept his mind focused, but no image formed.

He was about to turn away, when he thought he saw something. The image showed him a stony landscape. He looked closely, and saw thorn bushes with red berries growing among the boulders.

The scene expanded, and he saw partially constructed walls covered with scaffolding. Cranes were lifting huge blocks of stone from a quarry pit, and workers ran around the construction site like ants.

Then he noticed something else, the beginnings of a huge tower. Even unfinished, Saruman could tell that it was going to be absolutely massive.

Saruman could tell this was an image from the Second Age from around the time of the forging of the Ring, even though it wasn't as faded and blurred as images from the past usually are. He knew that a present-day image of Barad-dûr would show nothing but an enormous pile of rubble beside a lifeless volcano.



It was ten years before they learned where Sauron had gone. And when they did, it was only because he chose to reveal himself.

Whiffs of smoke were seen rising from Orodruin, and the sky over Mordor glowed orange at night. Then, for the first time since Sauron was defeated at the end of the Second Age, the mountain burst into flame.

The eruption might have been a natural event, except for one thing. Rangers from Ithilien reported a symmetrical feature on the promontory behind the volcano, visible from a hundred miles away. It rose like a spike from the debris field of what used to be Barad-dûr, before the men of Gondor pulled it down and reduced it to a pile of broken stones.

Either one could have been explained away, but together, they could mean only one thing. Sauron had returned to his ancient stronghold and openly declared himself.

At about the same time, the Nazgûl reoccupied Dol Guldur.

It was Radagast who spotted them first. He was exploring the woods between Rhosgobel and Dol Guldur when he saw a black robed figure moving delicately between the trees like a deer. Khamûl.

Khamûl and his companions at Dol Guldur, Nazgûl numbers seven and nine, continued to search the Gladden Fields as if nothing had happened.

# **Declared Openly**

## Chapter 19 The Last Meeting of the Council



Gandalf asked Saruman to call an emergency meeting of the White Council.

Saruman didn't know what Gandalf wanted to say, but he could guess. Gandalf was going to announce that Sauron had found the Ring.

It wasn't really a surprise. When Sauron was in Dol Guldur, he lay dormant most of the time. He concealed his identity and ran away whenever he was confronted. But now that he was back in Mordor, he was openly rebuilding his tower and breeding orcs, apparently in preparation for war. Saruman could think of nothing else to explain his sudden increase in power.

Actually, Saruman had suspected it for several years now. He should have told the White Council as soon as he knew, but he hadn't because he was ashamed of how he found out.



Two years earlier, while Saruman was watching Sauron's people reenacting the Disaster at Gladden Fields, he thought he saw them discover the spot where Isildur fell. The Istari forced Sauron out of Dol Guldur soon after, so the servants of Sauron never had a chance to come back and investigate further. But Saruman did.

Saruman sent his agents to search the spot. They discovered Isildur's bones there, in shallow water among the reeds on the West Bank of the Anduin.

Saruman knew the bones were Isildur's because they were

## The Last Meeting of the White Council

found with things that had belonged to him. Near his body, they discovered Isildur's crown with its famous jewel, the Elendimir. And on a chain around the skeleton's neck, they found the small gold case where Isildur kept the Ring.

The crown was an heirloom of unimaginable value, but in Saruman's mind, the case was the prize.

When it was delivered to him, Saruman couldn't open it right away because his hands were shaking too hard. He felt sick with fear and giddy with triumph, all at the same time. He hesitated, to make the moment last a little longer. Then he took a deep breath, opened the case, and looked inside.

It was empty.

Saruman dropped everything, and brought a team of laborers to the Gladden Fields to dig up the river bed from the site where Isildur's bones was found. The workers pulled cartloads of sand and gravel to shore.

Saruman watched closely as the sand and gravel from the river bottom was sifted through screen boxes. He worried that a small gold object could end up in a worker's pocket, so he stood beside them and watched everything they did. But even though they searched through tons of riverbed, he never saw the glint of gold or sensed the presence of a magical object.

Finally, when he realized the project was going nowhere, he decided to end it before the White Council noticed what he was doing. He went back to Orthanc, dejected. He feared that Sauron's people got there first and took the Ring but left the body and artifacts.

Later, it occurred to him that perhaps the Ring hadn't been in the little box when Isildur died. Perhaps the Ring had been on Isildur's hand, and became lost in the gravel beneath his bones. Saruman realized he'd given up too easily. He should have kept screening cartloads of sand until he found it. He resolved to go back and try again.

But then, he remembered how easily they drove Sauron from Dol Guldur. The White Council showed up, and he fled. It was too easy. Maybe Sauron was done searching the Gladden

Fields because he'd found what he was looking for. Maybe it was on his hand right now.

Saruman hid Isildur's gold case and crown in the secret closet at Orthanc. He told no one. He couldn't bring himself to tell anyone he'd found Isildur's body either, so he burned the bones.

He knew he was covering up a bad act with a worse one, but he did it anyway. Isildur came from a culture that attached great importance to tombs and monuments. He didn't deserve to end up in a trash pit. Afterwards, Saruman felt a profound sense of shame.



Saruman snapped out of his reverie when Gandalf stood to speak.

"The Nazgûl have reoccupied Dol Guldur and resumed searching the Gladden Fields," Gandalf said.

Saruman just about collapsed with relief. If Sauron was still searching for the Ring, then obviously he didn't have it.

Then he noticed that Gandalf, Elrond, and Galadriel were still wearing their Elven rings. They wouldn't be, if Sauron were wearing his. If Saruman had thought to look at their hands earlier, it would have saved him a lot of worry.

Gandalf was still speaking. "Meanwhile, his servants are looking for the Ring again, as though nothing had happened.

"They're making inquiries in villages all up and down the east bank of the Anduin, and in a few villages on the west bank as well. Some of the villages are hundreds of miles from the Gladden Fields. They're dredging the river and going through the gravel they bring up," said Gandalf.

Saruman cringed. He had never gotten around to telling the Council about his own search efforts. He decided it would be awkward to say anything now, especially since some of Gandalf's examples of Sauron's activities were actually Saruman's.

Saruman spoke next. "I don't think we need to worry. The Ring washed out to sea long ago."

## The Last Meeting of the White Council

Saruman didn't like the way Gandalf was looking at him.

He told Gandalf he'd made a study of the currents and tides between the Gladden Fields and the sea. A series of floods scoured the riverbed and swept most of the sand and gravel out to sea, taking the Ring with it.

"At this point, it can't be recovered," said Saruman.

"Marshlands don't get scoured away by floods. The reeds and water plants slow the current and hold the riverbed in place," said Radagast.

"Well, I also looked in the Palantir," said Saruman.

"Is that wise? The kings of Gondor stopped using the Ithil Stone after it was captured by the Nazgûl. If Sauron went to Minas Morgul after we drove him out, then there's something a lot worse than a Nazgûl in the Ithil Stone," said Elrond.

Saruman knew that. He was being extraordinarily careful.

As they were leaving, Gandalf pulled Saruman aside.

"Washed out to sea? Really?" he said. "Or perhaps you've already found it yourself?"

"Don't be ridiculous," said Saruman.

*And if I did find it, would that so terrible? The Ring isn't evil, it just magnifies the traits you already have. Maybe I'd become more skilled, or wise,* Saruman thought.

"What do you think he'd do to you, if he thought you had it?" said Gandalf.

*I'm not worried at all. I'd make him bow down and call me Lord,* Saruman thought.

## Chapter 20 A New Ringlord



Saruman was stung when Círdan gave his ring to Gandalf instead of himself. But it was nothing compared to what he felt when he found the case that held the One Ring, then opened it and found it empty.

The twin disappointments drove him to do something he never would have attempted otherwise. He forged another ring, only this time it wasn't to model a latching mechanism, it was to magnify his own power.

He pulled the ring out of the fire and plunged it into the quench barrel. He put the ring on, and right away, he could tell feel it. All his native abilities were amplified, not by a lot, but enough that he could tell.

He loved it. He wore it all the time.

He hadn't put any of his own power into his ring. The effect came entirely from the cleverness of his design. Saruman was an excellent ring maker. He believed he had just surpassed Sauron in skill, if not in might. It changed the way he thought of himself.

*I am Saruman, Maker of Rings.*

He couldn't believe what he'd done. It was crazy. He could just imagine how much grief he would get from the others. Perhaps it would be best not to mention it.



Saruman was in the archives at Minas Tirith, surrounded by ancient scrolls. He didn't feel the pleasure he usually took in historical artifacts. He was in a panic about how Sauron learned



of Isildur's end in the Gladden Fields. As far as he knew, Sauron and his servants didn't have access to the Library in Minas Tirith, but it was hard to be sure. The spies of the Enemy were everywhere.

Saruman examined the Ring inscription scroll, looking for any evidence it been handled since he was there last. When he was done with a scroll, he tied the archivist's red tape<sup>13</sup> in a half-hitch rather than a square knot like most people do. With a half-hitch, the tape lay flat and was less likely to damage the scroll. Happily, all the scrolls pertaining to the Ring were still tied with Saruman's half-hitch. He felt sure that the Sauron's servants hadn't seen them yet.

But they might yet. Saruman didn't know what he could do to prevent it. He considered hiding them under his robes and taking them to Orthanc, to lock them up safely. But several other scholars working at the next table might see him do it. Besides, the archivist would know who had them last.

Saruman considered destroying the scrolls. A knocked-over cup of tea would do it. He touched the mug, intending to spill it on the table. But Saruman was too much of a scholar to destroy irreplaceable historical documents. He tried, but he couldn't make himself do it.



Saruman made frequent use of the Palantir. Especially now that Sauron had it, he had to be careful not to draw the attention of the Ithil Stone.

But Saruman was chosen to Head of the White Council for a reason. He knew more about Sauron than any of the others. He shared a bedroom with him for all the years of their youth, so he knew something about him none of the others did.

If the world is divided up into night owls and larks, Sauron was a lark. He could not keep his eyes open past ten at night. If Sauron was using the Ithil Stone, he wasn't doing it after midnight.

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<sup>13</sup>Archivist's red tape is the historical origin of bureaucratic red tape.

## Saruman's Journey

Saruman, on the other hand, was an owl. A little past midnight, he pulled back the canvas cover and stared into the orb. He knew he was taking a risk using the Palantir, now that Sauron was in Mordor, but he thought the risk was manageable.

Saruman willed the Palantir to take him below the surface of the Anduin River. For hours, he searched among the rock and sand and water plants, looking for the glint of gold.



Saruman began to think of himself as the next Ringlord. At some point, he'd stopped seeing Sauron as an adversary and begun to think of him as a rival. When had that happened?

He'd spent a lot of time trying to learn how the ring was made, but that was just to understand its effect on Sauron. He'd made a few minor rings, but that was to discover if the Elven Rings could be freed from the One. None of those things had changed him.

It began when Saruman came so close to finding the Ring that he could almost feel the weight of it on his hand, and then thought Sauron had found it first. He felt like he'd been robbed. And later, when he made a few minor rings of his own, he was surprised to discover that his early designs were better than Sauron's first attempts. He began to think of himself as the new Ringlord.

But there was more to it than that. Saruman was more fit to wield the Ring than Sauron was. They shared the same goal, to bring order and stability to Arda, but Sauron had been corrupted during his long service to Morgoth.

Saruman, on the other hand, served the Valar. He had never admired Morgoth. In fact, he'd hardly ever spoken to him. Saruman knew that some people saw Morgoth as larger than life, magnificent and thrilling. But Saruman knew that Morgoth was a user, and entirely selfish. Even before the Rebellion, Saruman had no use for him. Saruman could not be turned to evil.

## A New Ringlord

When Saruman had the Ring, he would use it only for good. It would be a huge responsibility, but he was prepared to shoulder it.

It occurred to him, that when he claimed the Ring, the Nazgûl would belong to him, too. He knew a little about some of them. The Witch King's personality was similar to Sauron's. The second Nazgûl, Khamûl, who had been a Ranger in life, was careful and deliberate. His personality was the most similar to his own.

Saruman decided, when the time came, he would demote the Witch King and make Khamûl his Chief Nazgûl.

Saruman would need to claim the Ring in order to enslave Sauron. That was their mission, to contain Sauron and limit his influence. He decided there wouldn't be any harm if he got something out of it, too. He thought his brother apprentice needed to be taken down a peg. He wouldn't mind being the one to do it.

Saruman paced back and forth in the large audience chamber in Orthanc and lapsed into a daydream. In his fantasy, the Ring was his, and Sauron had been enslaved.

Saruman sat on his throne-like chair and commanded Sauron to kneel before him. He regarded the trembling figure at his feet. Finally he spoke.

"Do you know why we did this to you?"

The shivering figure shook his head no.

"Lay on your belly," commanded Saruman, and Sauron had to do it.

"You chose to follow Morgoth, the Disrupter of the Music. You enslaved, tortured, and slaughtered the Children of Ilúvatar, whom you were put on earth to protect.

"And your worst crime of all, the thing we can't forgive...."

In his mind's eye, Saruman saw Sauron in the temple of Morgoth, standing at the altar with a knife in his hand, indifferent to the pleas of the sacrificial victim. Visible through the door behind him, the ships of Ar-Pharazôn had already begun to leave the harbor, their sails filled by the freshening breeze. At Sauron's urging, the invasion of Valinor had begun.

## Saruman's Journey

"We can't forgive the fact that...you're still Aulë's favorite!"  
Whoa! Where did that come from? Tears stung his eyes. The game just stopped being fun.

## Chapter 21 The Trap is Sprung



aruman looked into the Palantir, searching below the surface of the Anduin for what must be at least the hundredth time.

It was just before dawn. He was tired, and his mind wandered. When he looked into the Palantir again, he wasn't sure at first what he was seeing.

Squares of soldiers, arranged row upon row, column upon column, vanishing into the distance. Standards. War machines. A hundred standard bearing the same heraldic device, the Lidless Eye.

*I can't believe he's become so strong, so fast, without the Ring.*

Sauron's armies looked as massive as his armies from the Second Age. The image didn't just look similar, it looked identical.

They appeared to be marching his way.

That image gave way to another. Isengard was in flames. There were fires underground, visible through fissures in the earth. Most of the trees were down, and the few that still stood were on fire. The Circle of Isen was overrun by orcs, far larger and fiercer than any that had come out of Mordor in the past. Even the sunlight didn't slow them down.

He couldn't stand it.

Then he saw an image of himself with his throat cut, his own blood soaking into the ground beneath him.

From his study of the Palantir in the archives, Saruman knew that Palantir images can't be faked. He was profoundly frightened.

"Join with me," the Lord of Mordor commanded him.

## Saruman's Journey

Saruman opened his mouth to speak, but couldn't.

"Join with me, and your reward will be great. Oppose me, and it will go the worse for you."

Saruman covered his hands with his face. He was almost in tears.

"What is your answer?"

"Fine, whatever," said Saruman.

*Now go away.*

Saruman threw the canvas over the Palantir, his heart beating so hard he could hear it.

*I will never, ever look into a Palantir again.*

Saruman remembered the day Gandalf told Manwë he was afraid of Sauron, and Saruman laughed at him. Back then, Saruman had absolutely no idea how dangerous Sauron could be.

A fast horse could take him to Lindon in less than a week. There, he would beg Círdan to take him from the Grey Havens to Valinor. And he would never, ever leave the Mansions of Aulë again.

Except that, when Gandalf said he was afraid and didn't want to go, Manwë made him do it anyway. If Saruman quit and fled to Valinor, Manwë would send him back. He didn't know what to do. He was trapped.

Saruman spent the night pacing back and forth in the large chamber. Sleep was impossible. He couldn't see any way out. Toward dawn, exhausted, he threw himself on top of the blankets, still in his clothes.

When he woke, the sun was high in the sky. The trees in the Circle of Isen looked normal, and the lawn and flowerbeds were lush and green. It was hard to believe anything bad could happen here.

He washed his face, put on clean clothes, and found something to eat. He felt much better.

After breakfast, he sat down at his desk with a cup of tea. He spread out fresh sheets of paper, dipped a pen in an inkwell, and considered his options.

On a sunny day like this, it was hard to believe anything

## The Trap is Sprung

terrible could happen. Dread horror lived in songs and far-away places, not in his own garden, so he was able to think about his situation calmly.

*Sauron is going to win. If I oppose him, I will lose. If I side with him, I can at least share in the rewards of his victory. I will be his ally but not his servant. And I'm only doing this to buy time.*

Saruman dipped the quill in ink and penned a few more lines.

*I will pretend to join him. I will win his trust, and then I will betray him.*

Once he had a plan, Saruman felt much calmer.

He resolved to tell Gandalf. He knew the risk he took in becoming Sauron's ally, but it would be a greater risk to oppose him.

He would encourage Gandalf to pretend to join also. He would feel better if he had a trusted friend at his side when he did this. He also considered asking Radagast, but decided against it. Radagast was pretty much useless.

Saruman climbed to the top chamber of Orthanc. He put his hand on the canvas, took a deep breath, and twitched it back. He saw an image forming in the Palantir. Celebrimbor, naked and impaled on a stake, blood running down his thighs, was being carried high like a banner in front of Sauron's army.

Sauron thought Celebrimbor had betrayed him, so he tortured him to death even. Celebrimbor was his friend, and the offense was minor.

Celebrimbor and Sauron worked together in the Gwaith-i-Mírdain for almost three hundred years. Then they went their separate ways when each began working in secret on his own project, Celebrimbor on the Three, and Sauron on the One.

Then Sauron learned that Celebrimbor was making the Three without him. Most people would have laughed and let it go, but not Sauron. He raised an army and swept across Eregion toward the Gwaith-i-Mírdain, leaving none alive if he could help it. Sauron didn't tolerate betrayal, and

## Saruman's Journey

his definition of betrayal was stricter than most people's. Saruman was shaking so hard he could barely stand.

*I can't betray him, he's too dangerous. I don't know what to do.*

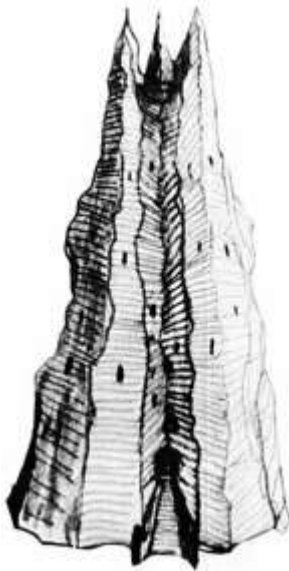
It was a long time before Saruman looked into the Palantir again. When he did, Sauron was waiting for him. Saruman grabbed for the edge of the canvas and was about to throw it over the Palantir, but his arm went limp. The canvas slipped from his fingers and fell to the floor.

Sauron named his terms.

"This is what I expect from you. You will report daily in the Palantir. You will open your gates to my servants, and stay out of their way. And above all, you will do my bidding."

Saruman didn't submit. He pretended to submit, to buy time. But all the while he was thinking,

*I will find your Ring, and when I do, I will nail you.*



The Tower of Orthanc by J.R.R. Tolkien