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Abstract

Examines and details Tolkien's developing understanding of the direction *The Lord of the Rings* should take—a window into the mind of a maker at work.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Criticism, Textual; Tolkien, J.R.R. The History of Middle-earth; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings—Textual history

Top Ten Rejected Plot Twists from *The Lord of the Rings*: A Textual Excursion into the “History of the *The Lord of the Rings*”

David Bratman

THIS paper was inspired by a similarly-titled humorous list posted in a Usenet archive (Aglialoro and Negri). It was pretty funny, but it occurred to me that an even funnier list could be made from plot twists that were rejected, not by some latter-day humorist, but by J. R. R. Tolkien himself: funnier both for their own sake, and because Tolkien actually considered them. In the end I came up with a list of eleven plot twists, not ten: a little extra, like the thirteenth stuffed mushroom in a baker's dozen.

We know about these rejects and false starts because Tolkien was a pack rat. He neither burned his rejects nor threw them in the trash; he saved them. Just about all of the drafts and manuscripts for *The Lord of the Rings* are preserved at the Archives of Marquette University, and a detailed narrative account of the slow crafting and polishing of the tale was stitched together by Christopher Tolkien in the four volumes of “The History of *The Lord of the Rings*,” a sub-series of the 12-volume *History of Middle-earth*. The volumes are *The Return of the Shadow*, *The Treason of Isengard*, *The War of the Ring*, and *Sauron Defeated*; the Appendices are treated separately in *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, and will not be discussed in this paper.

It is a tremendously rich, complex, and above all long story, this tale of how the masterpiece came to be—almost as rich and complex as the saga of Frodo and the Fellowship is itself; and at 1500 pages, it is longer too: *The Lord of the Rings* is only about 1100 pages in the standard hardcover (excluding the appendices in both cases). “The History of *The Lord of the Rings*” also begins rather slowly, a criticism some have made of *The Lord of the Rings* itself. At first Tolkien did not want to write a sequel to *The Hobbit* at all. Then as it slowly began to pour out of him, he was not certain whether his hero would be Bilbo Baggins, the original Hobbit, or a younger relative. Eventually he got a small band of hobbits on the road and into a series of picaresque adventures that enlarged in wordage, complexity, seriousness, and significance as fast as he

could write; so much so that when he finally got them to Rivendell he started all over from scratch again. He began Book 1 four separate times before proceeding much further. That part alone covers more than the first volume of the "History." By the end, Tolkien was writing his first drafts with speed, fluency, and (often) illegibility: sometimes with a clear vision of the final story, but not always, as we shall see. At various times, especially in the early stages, Tolkien would stop and try to peer into the distance, writing notes and brief outlines collected in the History in chapters called "The Story Foreseen." These sections provide some of the juiciest of the rejected plot twists.

Always, while writing *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien had the sense of not consciously inventing anything. "I wait till I seem to know what really happened. Or till it writes itself" he said (*Treason* 411). That at any rate was the theory. In practice it was harder to know whether something really happened until he had written it. In this paper we will hunt through the drafts for some of those precious moments that were authentically crossed out by their author. In the process we may laugh at some of his follies, for, as Richard C. West has written, "If we pick them out of the scrap heap it is only to show how wise the author was to throw them there" (6). We will also, I hope, find out something about how Tolkien did discover "what really happened," how his imagination burgeoned and budded and produced the rich complexity we know and love so well, and perhaps too we will learn a little about just why and how *The Lord of the Rings* is such a great work of art.

Rejected Plot Twist no. 1.

Anyone who was present at the first Milwaukee Mythopoeic Society Conference, at Marquette in 1987, will remember this one. *The Return of the Shadow* had not been published yet, and Christopher Tolkien in his enrapturing Guest of Honor speech read us this little excerpt from the then never-published drafts. Three hobbits are walking through the Shire—in this version the one with the Ring is named Bingo, and the other two are Odo and Frodo, but that's of no importance—when a mysterious rider comes by. Here's what Christopher Tolkien read:

[They were walking] on the flat among tall trees growing in scattered fashion in the grasslands, when Frodo said: "I can hear a horse coming along the road behind!"

They looked back, but the windings of the road hid the traveller.

They [*written above at the same time*: Odo & F.] ran quickly to the left down into a little hollow beside the road, and lay flat. Bingo slipped on his ring and sat down a few yards from the track. The sound of hoofs drew nearer. Round a turn came a white horse, and on it sat a bundle—or that is what it looked like: a small man wrapped entirely in a great cloak and hood so that only his eyes peered out, and his boots in the stirrups below.

“I think we had better get out of sight,” said Bingo; “or you fellows at any rate. Of course it doesn’t matter very much, but I would rather not be met by anyone we know.”

The horse stopped when it came level with Bingo. The figure uncovered its nose and sniffed; and then sat silent as if listening. Suddenly a laugh came from inside the hood.

“Bingo my boy!” said Gandalf, throwing aside his wrappings. “You and your lads are somewhere about. Come along now and show up, I want a word with you!” He turned his horse and rode straight to the hollow where Odo and Frodo lay. “Hullo! hullo!” he said. “Tired already? Aren’t you going any further today?” (*Return* 47-48)

There was a burst of uneasy laughter in the room when Christopher Tolkien reached the moment of revelation, and well there should be. The Black Rider, the Nazgûl, that fearsome creature—Gandalf in disguise? It cannot be! Now when we say that, it may be only because we have already read the book; we know the story. So it is all the more impressive that Tolkien, who had not read the book, had the same reaction. No: that is not Gandalf. It must be something else. Tolkien stopped writing soon after this point. Almost immediately, he changed the horse’s color to black—it was white as he first wrote it—and added a few more details: the cloak and hood are now also black, and the face is entirely shadowed rather than the eyes peering out. With those few changes we now have, almost word-for-word, the description of the Black Rider as he appears in the finished text.

But if the misidentification was that abortive, why did it occur at all? Because Gandalf had a way of showing up unexpectedly: you will recall how he suddenly stepped out from behind a tree near the end of chapter two of *The Hobbit*, having provoked the trolls into endless quarrelling by throwing his disguised voice at them. You could not have a hobbit adventure without Gandalf showing up to lend a hand. It was only natural. But look at how deciding that the rider is not Gandalf enriches and deepens the story. For a moment we had one simple action—Enter Gandalf—but now we begin to have questions. The Black Rider is not Gandalf, but he is still there. So who is he? Tolkien had no idea, and it was a long and hard road to find out. In the final text, Gandalf had already spoken of the Nazgûl to Frodo, but so glancingly that Frodo didn’t

recognize one after seeing it, not even when questioned on the point by Gildor. But no hint of this aspect yet existed in the narrative.

Another more subtle question also arises. If the Rider is not Gandalf, then where is Gandalf? The idea entered Tolkien's mind that Gandalf *should* have been accompanying the hobbits already, partly to protect them from encounters just such as this one. But he is not there. How and why he was delayed, and why he had not warned Frodo that he would be unable to return, took much longer to discover, and nearly drove Tolkien to despair in the process.

So we learn two things from this Rejected Plot Twist. First, that the idea of the Nazgûl originated in Tolkien's brain as a spinoff, a cleavage, from a phantom image of Gandalf on a horse. And second, that the process of dealing with this cleavage introduced new threads into the story and contributed much towards its rapid deepening of tone.

Rejected Plot Twist no. 2.

Frodo puts on the Ring in Farmer Maggot's house and plays rude practical jokes on him. Are you one of those readers who thinks there is too much low hobbit humor in *The Lord of the Rings*? Be thankful this did not survive. Remember that, as in the previous excerpt, the hobbit with the Ring is named Bingo, while the name Frodo belongs to a character vaguely equivalent to Pippin.

"Then I'll tell you what to think," said Maggot. "This Mr. Bingo Baggins has got into some trouble. [...] Mark my words, this all comes of some of those doings of old Mr. Bilbo's. Maybe there is some that want to know what has become of the gold and what not that he left behind. Mark my words."

"I certainly will," said Frodo, rather taken aback by old Maggot's guessing.

"And if you'll take my advice, too," said the farmer, "you'll steer clear of Mr. Bingo, or you'll be getting into more trouble yourself than you bargain for."

There was no mistaking the breath and the suppressed gasp by Frodo's ear on this occasion.

"I'll remember the advice," said Frodo. "But now we must be getting to Bucklebury. Mr. Merry Brandybuck is expecting us this evening."

"Now that's a pity," said the farmer. "I was going to ask if you and your friends would stay and have a bite and sup with me and my wife."

"It is very kind of you," said Frodo; "but I am afraid we must be off now—we want to get to the Ferry before dark."

"Well then, one more drink!" said the farmer, and his wife poured out some beer. "Here's your health and good luck!" he said, reaching for his mug. But at that moment the mug left

the table, rose, tilted in the air, and then returned empty to its place.

"Help us and save us!" cried the farmer jumping up and gaping. "This day is bewitched. First the dog and then me: seeing things that ain't." [. . .]

"You did not ask me to have a bite or a sup," said a voice coming apparently from the middle of the room. Farmer Maggot backed towards the fire-place; his wife screamed. "And that's a pity," went on the voice, which Frodo to his bewilderment now recognized as Bingo's, "because I like your beer. But don't boast again that no Baggins will ever come inside your house. There's one inside now. A thievish Baggins. A very angry Baggins." There was a pause. "In fact BINGO!" the voice suddenly yelled just by the farmer's ear. At the same time something gave him a push in the waistcoat, and he fell over with a crash among the fire-irons. He sat up again just in time to see his own hat leave the settle where he had thrown it down, and sail out of the door, which opened to let it pass.

"Hi! here!" yelled the farmer, leaping to his feet. "Hey, Grip, Fang, Wolf!" At that the hat went off at a great speed towards the gate; but as the farmer ran after it, it came sailing back through the air and fell at his feet. He picked it up gingerly, and looked at it in astonishment. The dogs released by Mrs. Maggot came bounding up; but the farmer gave them no command. He stood still scratching his head and turning his hat over and over, as if he expected to find it had grown wings. (*Return* 292-293)

Truly a low point in our hero's career, this teasing of a disagreeably sullen version of Farmer Maggot actually comes from the second draft. It is much more clumsy and heavy-handed than in the first draft, where only the mug drinks by itself: there are no tricks with the hat or Bingo's voice.

I said that as Tolkien wrote, his work expanded in length, complexity, significance, and seriousness. This second version is certainly longer and more complex than the first, but it is hardly more significant and certainly less serious. So what happened?

In two words, outside influence. C. S. Lewis once said that "No one ever influenced Tolkien—you might as well try to influence a bandersnatch," and that has often been taken as the definitive statement on Tolkien's independence of mind. But Lewis expanded on what he meant by this, and this is less often quoted: "He has only two reactions to criticism: either he begins the whole work over again from the beginning or else takes no notice at all" (Lewis 481). Here what happened is that an outside opinion on the first draft persuaded him to put in more foolishness in the second draft, contrary to his own better judgment.

And whose opinion was this? Why, that of his teenage son Christopher, of course. Bad taste is not limited to only today's teenagers. Casual readers of *The*

History of Middle-earth sometimes assume that Christopher Tolkien's most obvious qualification for the role of editor, his personal position as the son and confidant of the author, is his main qualification. But although he read much of *The Lord of the Rings* as it was being written, commented on it (as we are seeing), and later drew the maps, he knew little of the detailed drafting process as it was going on, and such memories as he has of his father's creative process are few and faint. His aesthetic sympathy with his father's interests and creative imagination, plus his training in textual editing, were more useful tools in compiling these books.

Here is what he has to say in *The Return of the Shadow* about his responsibility for this passage:

I was greatly delighted by the story of Bingo's turning the tables on Farmer Maggot, and while I retain now only a dim half-memory I believe I was much opposed to its loss: which may perhaps explain my father's retaining it after it had become apparent that it introduced serious difficulties. (297)

The "serious difficulties" referred to are primarily this: "in the next chapter it turns out that the other hobbits had known about the Ring, but that Bingo had not known that they knew" (294). So much for Bingo's sidekicks being as bewildered as the stupid farmer. And more importantly: in the second draft we now know, as we did not clearly in the first, that this is the One Ring to rule them all. You do not use it to play silly tricks. It took the hobbits a while to figure this out; it took the author almost as long.

Christopher Tolkien also noticed another problem with this farce: if Bingo is wearing Farmer Maggot's hat, why is it not invisible as Bingo's own clothes are? Tolkien tried to revise this so that it is the jug that goes running off, not the hat. But the whole notion of playing with the borders of invisibility is best dropped. Oh what a tangled web we weave . . .

Rejected Plot Twist no. 3.

Gandalf rides ahead with Fatty Bolger as a decoy to throw the Nazgûl's scent off Frodo. It works only too well: the Nazgûl capture Fatty, and . . . (at this point the text breaks off)

Here is the most complex hobbit story of them all, and one of the strangest. Those of you who have read the "History" books will know that the character in question is not named Fatty, but bears a variety of names, most notably that

of Odo Bolger. Odo is a unique character with a life of his own. But after he disappears from the narrative, what is left of him mutates through the name Hamilcar and ends up as Fredegar, the Fatty Bolger we know.

To cover Odo's history fairly would take more space than the rest of this paper, but here are a couple of the most striking versions. It may be best this time to begin by recalling the finished story in detail. Frodo and his three companions are in Bree. Fatty Bolger has been left behind in Crickhollow to keep up the illusion that Frodo is still living there. One night the Nazgûl show up. Fatty barely avoids meeting them:

As soon as he saw the dark shapes creep from the garden, he knew that he must run for it, or perish. And run he did, out of the back door, through the garden, and over the fields. When he reached the nearest house, more than a mile away, he collapsed on the doorstep. "No, no, no!" he was crying. "No, not me! I haven't got it!" It was some time before anyone could make out what he was babbling about. (*Lord* 1.188)

This, by the way, shows clearly the terror that the Nazgûl can induce in a timid hobbit in the final version. The Bucklanders raise a hullabaloo and the Nazgûl, their errand accomplished by discovering that Baggins is not there, depart. Later that day Gandalf arrives on Shadowfax, examines the evidence, and rides off in fear that Frodo may be captured. He learns from Butterbur that the hobbits are in Strider's hands, but continues east in the brave hope of drawing some of the Nazgûl off of Frodo's trail. In this he is partially successful (*Lord* 1.277).

So here is an alternate version of the attack on Crickhollow. This is as it appears in the second draft. The writing is already highly polished. Gandalf is already on the scene in disguise as "a grey man" when the Black Riders arrive. There is nothing about what Odo is doing.

After a long time a sound of hoofs was heard in the lane approaching swiftly. Horses were coming. Outside the gate they stopped; and then swiftly up the path there came three more figures, hooded, swathed in black, and stooping low towards the ground. One went to the door, one to the corners of the house-end at either side; and there they stood silent as the shadows of black yew-trees, while time went slowly on, and the house and the trees about it seemed to be waiting breathlessly.

Suddenly there was a movement. It was dark, and hardly a star was shining, but the blade that was drawn gleamed suddenly, as if it brought with it a chill light, keen and menacing. There was a blow, soft but heavy, and the door shuddered. "Open to the servants

of the Lord!" said a voice, thin, cold, and clear. At a second blow the door yielded and fell back, its lock broken.

At that moment there rang out behind the house a horn. It rent the night like fire on a hill-top. Loud and brazen it sounded, echoing over field and hill: *Awake, awake, fear, fire, foe! Awake!*

Round the corner of the house came the grey man. His cloak and hat were cast aside. His beard streamed wide. In one hand was a horn, in the other a wand. A splendour of light flashed out before him. There was a wail and cry as of fell hunting beasts that are smitten suddenly, and turn to fly in wrath and anguish.

In the lane the sound of hoofs broke out, and gathering rapidly to a gallop raced madly into the darkness. Far away answering horns were heard. Distant sounds of waking and alarm rose up. Along the roads folk were riding and running northward. But before them all there galloped a white horse. On it sat an old man with long silver hair and flowing beard. His horn sounded over hill and dale. In his hand his wand flared and flickered like a sheaf of lightning. Gandalf was riding to the North Gate with the speed of thunder. (*Return* 303-04)

And, Christopher Tolkien adds, "at the end of the text, after the words 'a sheaf of lightning,' [is] added in, 'Behind clung a small figure with flying cloak' and the name 'Odo'" (304). Yes, Gandalf's desperate ride is accompanied by a hobbit.

In this version, Frodo has not arrived at Bree yet, so Gandalf's coming and going there affords plenty of opportunity for tense review by Frodo and company later on, as does his companion. Gandalf had requested Butterbur, "If anyone—anyone, mind you, however strange—enquires after a hobbit called Baggins, tell them Baggins has gone east with Gandalf" (*Return* 339). Butterbur tells the Black Riders just that, and when Frodo Baggins does show up both he and Butterbur are puzzled as to what Gandalf had had in mind to do with Odo.

"Now, Mr. Hill [said Butterbur], what do you make of all that? I hope I've done right. If it had not been for Gandalf's orders, I'd never have given them news of Baggins, nor of anyone else. For these Black Men mean no good to anyone, I'll be bound. [. . .]"

"I'm very grateful," said Frodo. "I am sorry I can't tell you the whole story, Mr. Butterbur. I am very tired, and very worried. But if you want to know, I *am* Frodo Baggins. I have no idea what Gandalf meant by saying that Baggins had gone east with him; for I think the hobbit's name was Bolger. But these—er—Black Riders are hunting us, and we are in danger. I am very grateful for your help; but I hope you won't get into any trouble yourself on our account. I hope these abominable Riders won't come here again."

"I hope not indeed!" said Butterbur with alarm. (*Return* 340)

Does this mean that Gandalf's intent of drawing the Riders off now extends to virtually waving a decoy hobbit in their faces and intending for them to take him as the Ringbearer? It does. And take him they literally do. The hobbits and Strider arrive at Weathertop after Gandalf has left. In the finished version Gandalf leaves only a cryptic runic message. Strider notes "that he had no time or did not dare to write anything longer or plainer" (*Lord* 1.199). But in the draft we are discussing, he leaves a note:

Wednesday Oct. 5. Bad news. We arrived late Monday. Odo vanished last night. I must go at once to Rivendell. Make for Ford beyond Trollshaw with all speed, but look out. Enemies may attempt to guard it. G.

"Odo!" cried Merry. "Does that mean that the Riders have got him? How horrible!"

"Our missing Gandalf has turned out disastrous," said Frodo. "Poor Odo! I expect this is the result of pretending to be Baggins. If only we could all have been together!" (*Return* 355-56)

Only a few pages later, our heroes learn from Glorfindel that Gandalf has arrived safely in Rivendell, with a hobbit (361). When Frodo arrives in Rivendell, he asks Gandalf about it.

"Yes, it all comes back to me now," said Frodo. [...] "But now we are all safe! And Odo, too. At least, Glorfindel said so. How did you find him again?"

Gandalf looked [oddly >] quickly at Frodo, but he had shut his eyes. "Yes, Odo is safe," the wizard said. "You will see him soon, and hear his account. There will be feasting and merrymaking to celebrate the victory of the Ford, and you will all be there in places of honour." (*Return* 364-365)

And here is Christopher Tolkien's commentary on this passage:

Gandalf's "odd" or "quick" look at Frodo can only relate to his question about Odo, but since the story of Odo's vanishing from Weathertop and his subsequent reappearance (rescue?) was never told it is impossible to know what lay behind it. There is a suggestion that there was something odd about the story of his disappearance. Gandalf's tone, when taken with his "look" at Frodo, seems to have a slightly quizzical air. Glorfindel says (p. 361): "Certainly there is a hobbit of that name with him; but I did not hear that he had been lost": yet surely the capture of a hobbit by the Black Riders and his subsequent recovery was a matter of the utmost interest to those concerned with the Ring-wraiths? But whatever the story was, it seems to be something that will never be known.—It is curious that the wizard's sudden quick look at Frodo was preserved in FR (p. 236), when the Odo-story had of course disappeared, and Frodo's words that gave rise to the look were "But now we are safe!" (365)

Those are the second and third drafts. In the fourth draft another alternate version of the attack on Crickhollow appears. By this time Odo's name has changed to Hamilcar:

The house at Crickhollow stood silent. A curtain stirred in a window and for a moment a light gleamed out. At once a black shadow moved under the trees and passed out through the gate without a sound. The night deepened. There came the soft fall of hoofs [. . .]

The black figures passed swiftly in. In a moment they came out again; one was carrying a small bundled figure in an old cloak: it did not struggle. Now they leaped upon their horses without caution; in the lane the noise of hoofs broke out, and gathering to a gallop went hammering away into the darkness.

At the same moment [. . .] another horse came thundering along the lane. As it passed the gate a horn rang out. It rent the night like fire on a hill-top [. . .] Far away answering horns were heard; the alarm was spreading. Buckland was aroused.

But the Black Riders rode like a gale to the North Gate. Let the little people blow! Sauron would deal with them later. In the meanwhile they had earned his thanks: Baggins was caught like a fox in a hole. They rode down the watchmen, leaped the gate, and vanished.

And that is how Hamilcar Bolger first crossed the Brandywine Bridge. (*Treason* 55)

But Gandalf rides after the Nazgûl, attacks them and rescues Ham, and he arrives safely in Rivendell, hardly the worse for wear.

There seemed to be three hobbits sitting there with Gandalf. "Hurray!" cried one of them, springing up. "Here comes our noble cousin!" It was Hamilcar Bolger.

"Ham!" cried Frodo, astounded. "How did you come here? And why?"

"On horseback; and representing Mr. F. Baggins of Crickhollow, and late of Hobbiton," answered Ham.

Merry laughed. "Yes," he said. "We told him so, but he didn't believe it: we left poor old Ham in a dangerous post. As soon as the Black Riders had found Crickhollow, where Mr. Baggins was popularly supposed to be residing, they attacked it."

"When did that happen?" asked Frodo.

"Before dawn on Friday morning, four days nearly after you left," said Ham. "They got me"—he paused and shuddered—"but Gandalf came in the nick of time."

"Not quite the nick," said Gandalf. "A notch or two behind, I am afraid. [. . .] Then I had a hard chase: but I caught them ten miles beyond the Bridge. I have one advantage: there is no horse in Mordor or in Rohan that is as swift as Galeroc. When they heard his feet behind them they were terrified: they thought I was somewhere else, far away. I was terrified too, I may say: I thought it was Frodo they had got."

"Yes!" said Hamilcar with a laugh. "He did not know whether he was relieved or disgusted when he found it was only poor old Ham Bolger. I was too crushed to mind at the time: he bowled the Rider that was carrying me clean over; but I feel rather hurt now."

“You are perfectly well now,” said Gandalf; “and you have had a free ride all the way to Rivendell, which you would never have seen, if you had been left to your own sluggishness.” (*Treason* 68-69)

In a plotting note to himself from about this time, Tolkien writes “very emphatically and twice underlined: NO ODO” (*Treason* 7). It took him long enough—four traversals through the same Hobbiton-to-Rivendell story—to reach that conclusion. Fatty Bolger’s phantom career as a decoy and captive of the Nazgûl is ended, and he finally earns the more appropriate heroism of leading a band of rebels against Lotho and Saruman.

Rejected Plot Twist no. 4.

Aragorn is a hobbit. He hates Sauron because the Dark Lord had once captured him and tortured his hairy feet.

In one of his few public comments on the writing of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien remembered the early days of composition. “We had reached Bree,” he recalled, “and I had then no more notion than [the hobbits] had of what had become of Gandalf or who Strider was; and I had begun to despair of surviving to find out” (*Tree* 5). The mysterious stranger whom we first see sitting in the Prancing Pony looks like this:

Suddenly Bingo noticed that a queer-looking, brown-faced hobbit, sitting in the shadows behind the others, was also listening intently. He had an enormous mug (more like a jug) in front of him, and was smoking a broken-stemmed pipe right under his rather long nose. He was dressed in dark rough brown cloth, and had a hood on, in spite of the warmth,—and, very remarkably, he had wooden shoes! Bingo could see them sticking out under the table in front of him.

“Who is that over there?” said Bingo, when he got a chance to whisper to Mr. Butterbur. “I don’t think you introduced him.”

“Him?” said Barnabas, cocking an eye without turning his head. “O! that is one of the wild folk—rangers we call ’em. He has been coming in now and again (in autumn and winter mostly) the last few years; but he seldom talks. Not but what he can tell some rare tales when he has a mind, you take my word. What his right name is I never heard, but he’s known round here as Trotter. You can hear him coming along the road in those shoes: clitter-clap—when he walks on a path, which isn’t often. Why does he wear ’em? Well, that I can’t say. But there ain’t no accounting for East or West, as we say here, meaning the Rangers and the Shire-folk, begging your pardon.” (*Return* 137-38)

Trotter: a barefoot hobbit in wooden shoes, and a seasoned weather-beaten hobbit who behaves just like Aragorn. That is no exaggeration—many of Trotter's lines go straight into the mouth of the future King Elessar, and even the Song of Beren and Lúthien is originally sung by the voice of a hobbit. Once again, as with the Rider in the woods of the Shire, a striking new character entered Tolkien's imagination, under the wrong disguise. Only this time it took him a lot longer to penetrate. You can hear the desperation in Tolkien's notes to himself as he repeatedly asks the question, "Who is Trotter?" (*Return* 210, 214, 223).

At one point Tolkien thought he knew: Trotter was Peregrin Boffin, eldest of Bilbo's younger cousins, and one of those hobbits who went off on Adventures and never returned. And at Rivendell, we also learn something about his experience with evil:

Trotter described his search for Gollum that he had made with Gandalf's help, and told of his perilous adventures in Mordor. Thus it was that Frodo learned how Trotter had tracked Gollum as he wandered southwards, through Fangorn Forest, and past the Dead Marshes, until he had himself been caught and imprisoned by the Dark Lord. "Ever since I have worn shoes," said Trotter with a shudder, and though he said no more Frodo knew that he had been tortured and his feet hurt in some way. But he had been rescued by Gandalf and saved from death. (*Return* 401)

A marginal note to this passage suggests that maybe it should be revealed later that Trotter has not just wooden shoes, but wooden feet (*Return* 413). At least Butterbur had not said, as he does of Strider, that Trotter "goes about at a great pace" on those hobbling wooden feet (*Lord* 1.168).

Despite this handicap, Trotter gets all the way to Caradhras before it becomes clear that a hobbit, however tough, is essentially helpless in a deep snowdrift. Trotter has to sit there with the other hobbits while Boromir clears a path alone. "It may be thought," says Christopher Tolkien in his judicious tone, "that [. . .] considerations along these lines may have been an element in the decision about [Trotter] which my father would now shortly take" (*Return* 431). It is a relief to find a plotting note with, at last, something familiar in it: "Trotter is a man of Elrond's race, descendant of the ancient men of the North, and one of Elrond's household. He was a hunter and wanderer" (*Treason* 6-7). At this point he also receives the true name of Aragorn. The name Peregrin,

now detached from him, floats around until it finally settles on one of the younger hobbits.

There is only one problem: Aragorn is still called Trotter. Throughout the manuscript up to the very end, long after most of the other names had been settled, whenever the name Strider appears in the finished book the manuscript has Trotter. Aragorn even uses it as the basis of the Quenya name for his royal house. It was only after finishing that Tolkien executed a global change on his text from Trotter to Strider.

What is striking about this tale is not just that Tolkien mistook this strange weather-beaten character in Bree for a hobbit, but that it took him so very long to discover “what really happened,” generating in the process a complex phantom story of Peregrin Boffin and his tortured feet. It is as if he and Aragorn are two entirely different characters. Yet they are also the same character. Even the initial encounter between Trotter and Bingo remains basically unchanged throughout the drafts; it is the larger meaning, the significance of who this stranger is, that changes. Christopher Tolkien offers some very cogent thoughts on the relationship between Peregrin Boffin and Aragorn son of Arathorn:

It would obviously not be true to say merely that there was a role to be played in the story, and that at first this role was played by a Hobbit but afterwards by a Man. In particular cases, looked at narrowly without the larger context, this might seem a sufficient or nearly sufficient account. [. . .] But this says very little. I would be inclined to think that the original figure (the mysterious person who encounters the hobbits in the inn at Bree) was capable of development in different directions without losing important elements of his “identity” as a recognisable character—even though the choice of one direction or another would lead to quite different historical and racial “identities” in Middle-earth. So Trotter was not simply switched from Hobbit to Man—though such a switch could take place in the case of Mr. Butterbur with very little disturbance. Rather, he had been potentially Aragorn for a long time; and when my father decided that Trotter *was* Aragorn and *was not* Peregrin Boffin his stature and his history were totally changed, but a great deal of the “indivisible” Trotter remained in Aragorn and determined his nature. (*Return* 430-431)

Rejected Plot Twist no. 5.

Aragorn and Boromir are discussing global politics at the Council of Elrond:

“And the Men of Minas Tirith drove out my fathers,” said Aragorn. “Is not that remembered, Boromir? The men of that town have never ceased to wage war on Sauron, but they have listened not seldom to counsels that came from him. In the days of Valandur they murmured against the Men of the West, and rose against them, and when they came back

from battle with Sauron they refused them entry into the city. Then Valandur broke his sword before the city gates and went away north; and for long the heirs of Elendil dwelt at Osford the Northburg in slowly waning glory and darkening days. But all the Northland has now long been waste; and all that are left of Elendil's folk few.

"What do the men of Minas Tirith want with me—to return to aid [them] in the war and then reject me at the gates again?" (*Treason* 120-121)

If I read this aright, we are looking at the story developing so that the reason Boromir resents Aragorn is that Aragorn's Númenórean ancestors had enslaved Boromir's native Gondorian ancestors. Instead of being captured by Sauron, the last king of Gondor was kicked out in a slave rebellion.

This idea did not last as long as some of Tolkien's more surprising notions, but since it is from the fourth draft, it shows how very vaguely Tolkien understood future and historical developments at a very late stage in the process. If the hobbits sometimes seem uncertain about the details of the larger picture they're wandering through, they are only reflecting their author. Tolkien understood the climax of the tale from nearly the beginning—even at a very early stage *The Lord of the Rings* was intended as a hobbitish jaunt to a Fiery Hill, and he naturally assumed Gandalf's return even before writing his demise (*Return* 462)—but what came in between was extremely vague and only slowly grew. During an earlier phase of writing about the Council, Tolkien sent a dispirited note to his publisher saying that the book "is only about 3/4 written" (370). In fact he had gotten only one-sixth of the way through the total narrative. There was much more to discover about Middle-earth than even the author knew at this point.

Rejected plot twist no. 6.

Time does not just seem to stop in Lothlórien, it literally does. Our heroes rest and recuperate at leisure, and then carry on refreshed from the same instant.

Did you ever notice in the chronology that the hobbits spend almost exactly one month in Lórien? Sam notices it too. This is from the final text:

Sam sat tapping the hilt of his sword as if he were counting on his fingers, and looking up at the sky. "It's very strange," he murmured. "The Moon's the same in the Shire and in Wilderland, or it ought to be. But either it's out of its running, or I'm all wrong in my reckoning. You'll remember, Mr. Frodo, the Moon was waning as we lay on the flet up in that tree: a week from the full, I reckon. And we'd been a week on the way last night, when up

pops a New Moon as thin as a nail-paring, as if we had never stayed no time in the Elvish country.

“Well, I can remember three nights there for certain, and I seem to remember several more, but I would take my oath it was never a whole month. Anyone would think that time did not count in there!”

“And perhaps that was the way of it,” said Frodo. “In that land, maybe, we were in a time that has elsewhere long gone by. It was not, I think, until Silverlode bore us back to Anduin that we returned to the time that flows through mortal lands to the Great Sea. And I don’t remember any moon, either new or old, in Caras Galadon: only stars by night and sun by day.”

Legolas stirred in his boat. “Nay, time does not tarry ever,” he said; “but change and growth is not in all things and places alike. For the Elves the world moves, and it moves both very swift and very slow. Swift, because they themselves change little, and all else fleets by: it is a grief to them. Slow, because they [need] not count the running years, not for themselves. The passing seasons are but ripples ever repeated in the long long stream. Yet beneath the Sun all things must wear to an end at last.”

“But the wearing is slow in Lórien,” said Frodo. “The power of the Lady is on it. Rich are the hours, though short they seem, in Caras Galadon, where Galadriel wields the Elven-ring.”

“That should not have been said outside Lórien, not even to me,” said Aragorn. “Speak no more of it! But so it is, Sam: in that land you lost your count. There time flowed swiftly by us, as for the Elves. The old moon passed, and a new moon waxed and waned in the world outside, while we tarried there. And yestereve a new moon came again. Winter is nearly gone. Time flows on to a spring of little hope.” (*Lord* 1.404-405; text correction from *Treason* 366)

Sam is more right than he realizes. There is a reason for a whole month to have passed and the moon being the same: that way, Tolkien did not have to rewrite any later references to the moon’s phases after abandoning the notion that time in Lórien literally stops.

Some readers may ask, what is so bad about this idea? Many fantasy novels contain realms outside of time. Even in Narnia, time passes differently from in the primary world, though at an irregular pace as suits the author’s whim. I brought this point up about Lórien because it shows Tolkien’s developing conception about the nature of Elven magic. He dropped the idea of time literally stopping because it would be too blatant. The elf-hill where seven years, or a hundred years, pass in a single night, is a standard fairy-tale motif, also appearing in literary works such as *Rip Van Winkle* and *Brigadoon*. But whether time passes more swiftly or not at all, Tolkien realized as he developed his tale that he didn’t want Elven magic to work quite that way.

We have all experienced the subjective flexibility of time dependent on enjoyment: a morning at a Mythopoeic Conference passes like a breeze, while a morning at the airport waiting for a delayed flight seems endless. Certainly Lórien feels timeless. Notice Legolas's comment that by entering into the Elven kingdom, we enter in part into the Elven mind-set, by which time seems—subjectively, not through magic—to pass differently. Then Frodo adds that the effect is more intense in Lórien because of the preservative effect of the Elven-ring. Aragorn stops him. Hush, Frodo! That's as blatant about magic as we are allowed to get. Tolkien is getting away from a view of magic in which rings of invisibility might turn up in anyone's pockets.

Once Tolkien settled on this conception, he applied it consistently and played it off against simpler notions of magic. Sam thinks of magic as something spectacular, like Gandalf's fireworks, or elven magic in old tales. He is puzzled that, while Lórien seems magical, nothing like that is going on there. "If there's any magic about," he says, "it's right down deep, where I can't lay my hands on it, in a manner of speaking. [. . .] You can't see nobody working it." Yet, as Frodo observes, "You can see and feel it everywhere" (*Lord* 1.376). That is the essence of Elven-magic. It is there, and you can feel it but not measure it: there is no clever gold watch, or a man behind a curtain.

Soon Galadriel appears and takes them to her mirror. She says to Sam, "This is what your folk would call magic, I believe; though I do not understand clearly what they mean; and they seem also to use the same word of the deceits of the Enemy. But this, if you will, is the magic of Galadriel" (1.377). I find this comment, which does not occur in the drafts, to be extremely interesting. Galadriel does not think as we do, and does not use our category of "magic." The life of the Elves is unified: there is no clear distinction between magic and the rest of their acts; there is nothing unnatural about their magic. Yet they do draw a clear distinction between their work of art and preservation, and the destructive acts of the Enemy. They do not associate the two, as we do, because they are merely both outside the capabilities of hobbits. Elven magic is also dangerous and upsetting—Tolkien prefers the term "perilous"—in a way that a more mechanistic magic would not be. After viewing the Mirror, Sam does not want to see any more magic.

An old saw in science-fiction circles, called Clarke's Law, states that "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." However

convenient this may be for science-fiction writers who want to employ advanced technology in their stories without explaining how it works, the converse is not true. Magic is not always indistinguishable from a sufficiently advanced technology. Certainly Tolkien's was not. The science-fictional mechanistic mode is alien to his story, he said (*Letters* 274). That, and not just the hint of allegory, is part of what annoyed him about equating the Ring with the A-bomb. Tolkien's clearest statements on this matter are found in his letter regarding the abortive 1958 film treatment of *The Lord of the Rings*. The Nazgûl's power "is almost entirely due to the unreasoning *fear* which they inspire" (272), not to their mere physical strength. In other words, role-playing game fans, their peril is not measured in hit points. The screenwriter, thinking in science-fiction terms, calls lembas a "food concentrate." Tolkien bristles at this. "No analysis in any laboratory," he says, "would discover chemical properties of lembas that made it superior to other cakes of wheat-meal" (274). This comes, I think, from his religion. No analysis in any laboratory would discover chemical properties of the Eucharistic wafer that makes it the Body of Christ, but to a devout Catholic that is exactly what it is. And lembas too, as Tolkien notes, has a religious significance. It

had a virtue without which they [Frodo and Sam] would long ago have lain down to die. It did not satisfy desire. [. . .] And yet this waybread of the Elves had a potency that [. . .] fed the will, and it gave strength to endure, and to master sinew and limb beyond the measure of mortal kind. (*Lord* 3.213)

No food concentrate could do that.

If Tolkien had allowed his story to fall into either the fairy-tale elf-hill mode or the science-fiction mechanistic mode, I believe *The Lord of the Rings* would have been far less than the great work it is.

Rejected plot twist no. 7.

Boromir is not killed by Orcs, but, maddened more by jealousy of Aragorn than Ring-lust, he betrays the Free Peoples to Saruman.

This one appears in a series of outlines written to plan the way ahead while the full writing is between Moria and Lórien. There is no full drafting of the notion, but in the outline we see Aragorn and Boromir arriving in Minas Tirith. Denethor is slain (it doesn't say how or under what circumstances) and Aragorn is somehow chosen to lead Gondor. It is at this point that the "jealous

and enraged” Boromir “deserts and sneaks off to Saruman, seeking his aid in getting [the] lordship.” Tolkien also notes that by this time “evil has now got complete hold of Boromir” (*Treason* 211). Is this in any way because of the Ring? Hard to say.

But it is at this point that the idea enters the narrative of a betrayal to Saruman by someone with overweening personal ambition. Some may say that Tolkien kills Boromir off to avoid this disgraceful fate for him, but the idea remained, although it became attached to someone else. It was not until after drafting the Edoras chapters that the figure of Wormtongue and his specific treachery would emerge out of a general malaise at Theoden’s court, but the notion of a traitor was already in the air before it settled on him, without any specific Ring-lust to feed it. Wormtongue’s more conventional lust, for Éowyn, is just a side-issue. The malaise caused by the influence of evil is what really guides Wormtongue’s treachery, as it does Boromir’s with or without a Ring to focus it. In a sense, as the Black Rider grows out of Gandalf, the character of Wormtongue grows out of Boromir—Boromir as he might have been had he not been killed. The act is similar, even if the motivation and context are different. Again we see Tolkien’s method of constructing, adding to, and enriching the story (cf. Christopher Tolkien’s comment, *Treason* 214).

Rejected Plot Twist no. 8.

I mentioned that, after Gandalf fails to show up in the Shire, Tolkien had to consider what had happened to him instead. In the final text, Gandalf at Rivendell tells Frodo at first only so much and no more about what happened to him:

“I was delayed,” said Gandalf, “and that nearly proved our ruin.[. . .]”

[.]

“[. . .] Why were you delayed?” [asked Frodo.]

“At the moment I will only say that I was held captive.”

“You?” cried Frodo.

“Yes, I, Gandalf the Grey,” said the wizard solemnly. “There are many powers in the world, for good or for evil. Some are greater than I am. Against some I have not yet been measured.” (*Lord* 1.232)

In the third draft, Gandalf is less solemn and pompous, and more forthcoming. If you have not read this, prepare for a surprise.

“At the moment I will only say that I was held captive.”

“You!” cried Frodo.

“Yes!” laughed Gandalf. “There are many powers greater than mine, for good and evil, in the world. I was caught in Fangorn and spent many weary days as a prisoner of the Giant Treebeard.” (*Return* 363)

Treebeard is without a doubt the most original creation in *The Lord of the Rings*. Critics expressing their admiration for Tolkien’s fertile invention usually point to the ents and Tom Bombadil, but Bombadil was not created for *The Lord of the Rings*, but imported fully-grown from a poem written some years earlier (“The Adventures of Tom Bombadil,” later issued in a book of that title). The ents were invented in the person of Treebeard, and his evolution as a character is a key step in the history of the book.

First we must notice that Treebeard precedes Saruman in the role of captor, and by a good margin. It is not until the next draft that the renegade wizard makes his first appearance. For a brief time in Tolkien’s mind, Treebeard is Saruman’s loyal lieutenant (*Treason* 71); at another point Gandalf is handed over to the Nazgûl who stand motionless watching him, which rather puts a damper on their hunt for the Ring (*Treason* 33-34); soon enough Tolkien remembers from the “Out of the Frying Pan Into the Fire” chapter of *The Hobbit* that Gandalf cannot fly, so Saruman feels safe enough placing him on the top of Orthanc. And it follows from the same chapter that if Gandalf cannot fly, an eagle can carry him, and his rescue is born.

The other point worth noting is that, although Tolkien had Treebeard’s arboreal characteristics in mind from the beginning, he is described as a giant, as if his height is his most distinctive feature. Although in *The Lord of the Rings* he is said to be tall, at least fourteen feet high, this is not made much of. Discovering that he began as a giant clarifies a point which had puzzled Tolkien scholars for years: why is the name “ent,” an Old English word for giant, used to describe creatures so different from traditional giants, the legendary but mighty builders of the *enta geweorc* like Stonehenge? The answer is that the Ents as we know them evolved out of creatures which were more explicitly giants.

There are a couple references to giants in *The Hobbit*, where they appear to be strong but capricious characters, a bit like Beorn: at one point Gandalf hopes to “find a more or less decent giant” to block up the cave where the

heroes were captured (105), and the question of whether the giant Treebeard is “more or less decent” or not is important to his early conception. It was obvious to Tolkien from the start that a hobbit or two would have to meet Treebeard. At first it was going to be Frodo, and their meeting initially read like this:

When Frodo heard the voice he looked up, but he could see nothing through the thick entangled branches. Suddenly he felt a quiver in the gnarled tree-trunk against which he was leaning, and before he could spring away he was pushed, or kicked, forward onto his knees. Picking himself up he looked at the tree, and even as he looked, it took a stride towards him. He scrambled out of the way, and a deep rumbling chuckle came down out of the tree-top.

“Where are you, little beetle?” said the voice. “If you don’t let me know where you are, you can’t blame me for treading on you. And please, don’t tickle my leg!”

“I can’t see any leg,” said Frodo. “And where are you?” “You must be blind,” said the voice. “I am here.” “Who are you?” “I am Treebeard,” the voice answered. “If you haven’t heard of me before, you ought to have done; and anyway you are in my garden.”

“I can’t see any garden,” said Frodo. “Do you know what a garden looks like?” “I have one of my own: there are flowers and plants in it, and a fence round it; but there is nothing of the kind here.” “O yes! there is. Only you have walked through the fence without noticing it; and you can’t see the plants, because you are down underneath them by their roots.”

It was only then when Frodo looked closer that he saw that what he had taken for smooth tree-stems were the stalks of gigantic flowers—and what he had thought was the stem of a monstrous oaktree was really a thick gnarled leg with a rootlike foot and many branching toes. (*Return* 382, 384)

He seems like a kindly enough fellow, but a note which immediately follows reads that Frodo “is deceived by the giant who pretends to be friendly, but is really in league with the Enemy” (384). Later, Tolkien decides that “Treebeard turns out a decent giant” after all (*Treason* 210). We should not forget that even in *The Lord of the Rings* Treebeard has his dangerous side, and not just to Saruman: “If I had seen you before I heard you,” he tells Merry and Pippin, “I should have just trodden on you, taking you for little Orcs, and found out my mistake afterwards” (*Lord* 2.67).

Rejected Plot Twist No. 9.

The following quotation is from a list of loose ends needing to be cleaned up, which Tolkien made for himself while writing the Rohan chapters: “Aragorn weds Éowyn sister of Eomer [. . .] and becomes King of Gondor” (*Treason* 448).

You knew it had to happen, right? Certainly this seems to be the version of the story that Éowyn herself had in mind. Here we see two of Tolkien's notable habits: first, giving his characters his own weaknesses, by having Éowyn jump to the same conclusion that he himself had briefly fallen for; second, the way in which new characters were created to fill gaps caused by the changes in older characters' roles. Arwen emerged very late in the writing to fill the place of a more appropriate mate for Aragorn; and Faramir, whose first appearance as Frodo's help in the wilderness had been almost as unexpected as Aragorn's (*Letters* 79), moves into the role of a more appropriate mate for Éowyn. Arwen's late appearance—she is first mentioned as the weaver of the banner Aragorn raises on the ships of Harad (*War* 370)—may partly explain the sketchy nature of her character, but Tolkien went back through the manuscripts and added previous appearances and foreshadowings of her as far back as Rivendell.

Rejected Plot Twist no. 10.

This comes from an outline of the climax at Mount Doom, which begins with a fuller description of Frodo's state of mind than we get in the final text (which is mostly from Sam's perspective), and then suddenly descends into farce, corrects itself, and then descends into farce again.

Frodo toils on alone up slope of Mt. Doom. Earth quakes; the ground becomes hot. There is a narrow path winding up. It crosses one great fissure by a dreadful bridge. [...] Near the summit is "Sauron's Fire-well". The path enters an opening in the side of the Mt. and leads into a low chamber, the floor of which is split by a profound fissure. Frodo turns back. He looks NW and sees dust and smoke of battle? [...] Suddenly he sees birds circling above: they come down and he realizes that they are Nazgûl! He crouches in the chamber-opening but still dare[s] not enter. He hears feet coming up the path.

At the same moment Frodo suddenly feels, many times multiplied, the impact of the (unseen) *searching eye*; and of the enchantment of the Ring. He does not wish to enter chamber or to throw away the Ring. He hears or feels a deep, slow, but urgently persuasive voice speaking: offering him life, peace, honour: rich reward: lordship: power: finally a share in the Great Power—if he will stay and go back with a Ring Wraith to Baraddur. This actually terrifies him. He remains immovably balanced between resistance and yielding, tormented, it seems to him a timeless, countless age. Then suddenly a new thought arose—not from outside—a thought born inside *himself*: he would keep the Ring himself, and be master of all. Frodo King of Kings. Hobbits should rule (of course he would not let down his friends) and Frodo rule hobbits. He would make great power and sing great songs, and all the earth should blossom, and all should be bidden to his feasts. *He puts on the Ring!* A great cry rings out. Nazgûl come swooping down from the North. The *Eye* becomes suddenly like a beam of fire

stabbing sheer and sharp out of the northern smoke. He struggles now to take off the Ring—and fails.

The Nazgûl come circling down—ever nearer. With no clear purpose Frodo withdraws into the chamber. Fire boils in the Crack of Doom. All goes dark and Frodo falls to his knees.

At that moment Gollum arrives, panting, and grabs Frodo and the Ring. They fight fiercely on the very brink of the chasm. Gollum breaks Frodo's finger and gets Ring. Frodo falls in a swoon. Sam crawls in while Gollum is dancing in glee and suddenly pushes Gollum into the crack.

Fall of Mordor.

Perhaps better would be to make Gollum repent in a way. He is utterly wretched, and commits suicide. Gollum has it, he cried. No one else shall have it. I will destroy you all. He leaps into crack. Fire goes mad. Frodo is like to be destroyed.

Nazgûl shape at the door. Frodo is caught in the fire-chamber and cannot get out!

Here we all end together, said the Ring Wraith.

Frodo is too weary and lifeless to say nay.

You first, said a voice, and Sam (with Sting?) stabs the Black Rider from behind.

Frodo and Sam escape and flee down mountain-side. (*Sauron* 4-5)

Merry and Éowyn did not have it anywhere near as easy. Tolkien soon enough realized that this early conception would not do:

all these last bits [. . .] no longer fit in detail, nor in elevation (for the whole thing has become much larger and loftier) [. . .] It will probably work out very differently from this plan when it really gets written, as the thing seems to write itself once I get going, as if the truth comes out then, only imperfectly glimpsed in the preliminary sketch. (*War* 219)

Frodo's delirium, and even more Sam's successful attack on the Nazgûl, remind me of Sam's own "wild fantasies" as Ringbearer of "Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age, striding with a flaming sword across the darkened land, and armies flocking to his call as he marched to the overthrow of Barad-dur" (*Lord* 3.177). Once again, Tolkien has given his own weaknesses to his characters. If he had let Sam perform such antics in the end, it would have been a lesser book. Sam's actual heroism—the "cold courage" that T. A. Shippey notes of Bilbo's daring to face Smaug (61)—is enough.

But Sam pushing Gollum into the crack reminds me of something else. The quotation below is from a totally different book, nothing to do with Tolkien, but some readers may recognize it.

"It's many a hard kilo to the Black Hole," said [Frito], fingering the Ring.

"No lie, bwana," said Spam.

"This nearer tar pit has a certain holelike flavor," said Frito.

"Round," agreed Spam. "Open. Deep." [...]

"Indeed," said Frito, flinging the Ring in the air and deftly catching it behind his back. [...] "Pity we have no weight to anchor it safely to the bottom. [...] Accidents can happen."

"Just in case," said Spam, searching vainly in his pack for some heavy object. "A dead weight, a sinker," he muttered.

"Hello," said a gray lump behind them. "Long time no see."

"Goddam, old shoe," crooned Spam, and dropped a coin at Goddam's feet.

"Small world," said Frito as he palmed the Ring and clapped the surprised creature on the back.

"Look!" cried Frito, pointing to an empty sky. "The Winged Victory of Samothrace." And as Goddam turned to see, Frito looped the chain over his neck.

"Holla," cried Spam, "a 1927 indian-head nickel!" and dropped on his hands and knees in front of Goddam.

"Whoops!" said Frito.

"Aiyeee," added Goddam.

"Floop," suggested the tar pit. (Beard and Kenney 153-4)

That is, of course, from *Bored of the Rings*, the Harvard Lampoon version. Those parodists wrought better than they knew. I think it is highly significant how close Tolkien came to inadvertently writing the parody version of his own novel—and how completely, in the end, he managed to avoid it.

Rejected Plot Twist no. 11.

Back home in the Shire, the ruffians are defeated when Frodo kills Saruman in dramatic single combat.

Actually, it is not Saruman. It is Sharkey, who in this draft is a different character, just a ruffian. It reads like this:

"You've outlived your time, Ruffian Sharkey [said Frodo]. The Dark Tower has fallen and there is a King in Gondor. [...] We come from the King. I give you three days. After that you are outlaw, and if you're found in this Shire you shall be killed. [...] Your way leads downhill and [to] the East. Quick now!"

The orc-man looked at them with such a leer of hatred as they had not seen even in all their adventures. "[...] you're liars like all your kind. [...] And four to one, which makes you so bold."

"Very well," said Frodo, "one to one." He took off his cloak. Suddenly he shone, a small gallant figure clad in mithril like an elf-prince. Sting was in his hand; but he was not much

more than half Sharkey's stature. Sharkey had a sword, and he drew it, and in a [?fury] hewed double-handed at Frodo. But Frodo using the advantage of his size and [?courage] ran in close holding his cloak as a shield and slashed his leg above the knee. And then as with a groan and a curse the orc-man [?toppled] over him he stabbed upwards, and Sting passed clean through his body.

So died Sharkey the Boss. [...] (*Sauron* 91-92)

Just like the Lord of the Nazgûl, if it comes to that.

Christopher Tolkien remarks that

It is very striking that here, virtually at the end of *The Lord of the Rings* and in an element in the whole that [the author] had long meditated, the story when he first wrote it down should have been so different from its final form (or that he so signally failed to see 'what really happened?'). (*Sauron* 93)

What is so striking about this particular passage is that by the time Tolkien came to write it, he had already fully achieved what some critics have called the Passion of Frodo, his Christlike suffering and self-sacrifice. Even Frodo's statement in Mordor that "I do not think it will be my part to strike any blow again" (*Lord* 3.204) was already on paper (*Sauron* 32).

How could Tolkien have misread his own creation so badly? The answer lies, perhaps, in his remark that "*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision" (*Letters* 172; see also 255). Tolkien's unconscious, the part of his mind that knew "what really happened," created these patterns. But when his unconscious was not acting, and he had to proceed on pure invention alone, it sometimes took his conscious mind a while to catch on to what his unconscious had been doing.

One other point about the fight with Sharkey. In every other instance in this survey when something is done by the wrong character—Gandalf sniffing for Frodo in the Shire, Boromir betraying the West, Treebeard kidnapping Gandalf, Éowyn marrying Aragorn—the right character was a later, new emergence. Here for the first time we see two characters being folded into one: Sharkey the chief ruffian becomes merely a use-name for Saruman. This would become characteristic of Tolkien's later writings, in which he began to systematize his imaginary world and simplify, perhaps over-simplify, its riot of invention. But such topics as that would take us far beyond the scope of this paper.

In retrieving these Rejected Plot Twists from the scrap heap, we have seen Tolkien's imagination invent numerous striking ideas and characters. We have seen his conscious mind describe and interpret these, sometimes fastening on their true essence immediately and sometimes fumbling for a long time.

We have seen him reject concepts like Odo's ride and Lórien's unobtrusive timelessness that did not quite fit into his creation. We have seen him create new characters out of unexpected sources and fold them together again. And most of all, we have seen his careful, dedicated drafting and re-drafting until he got it right. It is unfortunate that Tolkien left us as few completed works as he did, but his perfectionism also meant that what he did complete was created with all the care he could bring to it. He never sent a hasty first draft carelessly off to the publisher.

Much of what makes Tolkien a great writer can be seen on display in "The History of the *The Lord of the Rings*," and I hope this paper will convince readers to look into these four volumes.

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