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Letters

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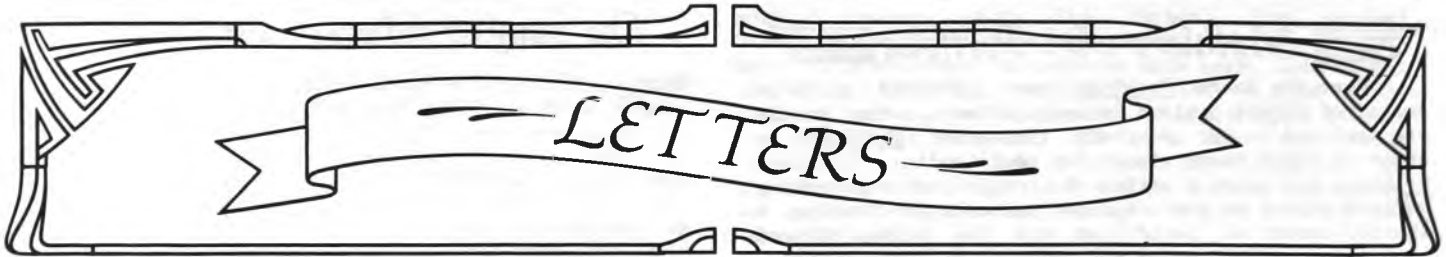
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Letters



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Nancy-Lou Patterson Waterloo, Ont., Canada

There is a small but misleading error in the text of my article, "'Some Kind of Company' -- The Sacred Community in That Hideous Strength," which appeared in Mythlore XLVII (Autumn 1986). The first line of the fourth paragraph of the second column on page 12 should read as follows:

"Although I have suggested that Cecil and Margaret Dimble became members of the company before them, it is obvious that Arthur Denniston and his wife Camilla were resident at St. Anne's before the Dimbles were forced from their home and repaired there too."

I have underlined the missing phrase: without it, the sense of the sentence was completely changed.

Robert A. Hall, Jr. Ithaca, NY

Some readers of Mythlore have expressed disagreement with my suggestion* that Gollum's falling into the fires of Mount Doom, at the climactic point of The Lord of the Rings, may have been due to a silent command given him by Frodo. They point out, and rightly, that Tolkien himself spoke of Frodo's yielding to the overpowering temptation to proclaim himself the master of the Ring. But I don't think the two explanations are mutually exclusive.

I would interpret the sequence of events as follows. Frodo (being, after all, hobbit-human) does yield to temptation at the crucial moment. Before Frodo has had any chance whatsoever to exert any power that the Ring might possibly have given him, however, Gollum jumps on him and tries to wrest the Ring from him. Tolkien does not tell us exactly how long the struggle lasts before Gollum seizes Frodo's finger and starts to bite it off, but we can probably assume that it is a matter of minutes (anywhere from one to three, perhaps even longer).

This gives Frodo time to realize (1) the enormity of his failure to fulfill his Quest, in that he has asserted his ownership of the Ring, and also (2) the way of utilizing the situation thus created, so that he can remedy his mis-step. He is now the "Master of the 'Precious'," whom Gollum has sworn to obey; and Gollum has broken his oath, by attacking Frodo. Frodo, therefore, does exactly what he has warned Gollum that he would do, i.e. (silently) commands Gollum to hurl himself, together with the Ring, into the fires of Mount Doom. Does he perhaps command Gollum to bite off his, Frodo's, finger, so that the loss of the finger may serve to atone for Frodo's momentary failure? -- or does he issue the silent

command after Gollum has started to bite off the Ring-finger? As for this (in contradistinction to the possibility of Frodo's issuing a silent command), there is no way of telling.

From the point of view of the story-line, Frodo's claiming the Ring for his own is essential, in order that Sauron may become alerted to his immense error in judgement, and may call off the Nazgûl from their attack on Aragorn's army. For the reader's sense of the dramatic conflict, it is essential that there should be at least a touch of hamartia, of a tragic flaw, in Frodo's actions at the climactic moment, so that the "eucatastrophe" can stand out in all that much stronger contrast. Just think of how flat it would fall if Frodo were simply to stride heroically to the edge of the Cracks of Doom and fling the Ring in. That is what Sam pretty much expects him to do (as witness Sam's vision of Frodo all robed in white, as a Christ-like redeemer, a page or two earlier); but Tolkien knew enough to portray Frodo as, after all, not a hero, but just an ordinary hobbit-human. The reader is thereby enabled to identify him- or herself with Frodo much more easily, and his accomplishment stands out as all the more extraordinary and praise-worthy because of his momentary failure and self-rescue.

*In my articles "Silent Commands? Frodo and Gollum at the Cracks of Doom," Mythlore 10:3 (#37), 5-7 (1983), and "Who is the Master of the 'Precious'?", Mythlore, 11:3 (#41), 34-35 (1985).



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