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Letters

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Letters

LETTERS

Readers' Letters are an important form of feedback and exchange, an opportunity to comment on past issues, and to raise questions for other's comments. Each letter that is printed extends the writer's subscription by an additional issue. Please send your letters directly to the Editor:

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Monterey Park, CA 91754. USA

Jan Long

Wauwatosa, WI

My husband and I were most amused with Tom Loback's demographic studies. Being students of military history, we were most disturbed that Mr. Loback neglected to base his information on sources besides J.R.R. Tolkien's writings. I personally feel that Tolkien would have gleaned a good chunk of this sort of information from his days in the British army. Our estimates (based on real military extrapolations) show that Mr. Loback indeed is fairly close in his Orc militia demographics as shown below:

(20th century) General numbers	Loback's numbers
(1) troop	= orc (1)
(40-50) platoon	= band / party (50-100)
(100-200) company	= small company (100-500)
(± 100-800) battalion	= \
(± 1000) brigade*	= — large company
(± 3000; 3 battalions	= / (500-2500)
(± 12M-15M) division	= legion (10M-15M)
(± 45M; 2 divisions) army	= army / host (10M-50M)
(± 90M; 2 armies) corp	= great army (50M-75M)
(± 180M; 2 corps)	= main host (75M-150M)

* A brigade is a British "specialty" outfit (not found in US military. M = 1000.)

Of course, our figures vary with a number of factors: US or British; Marine or Army; war or peacetime; year; infantry or artillery, etc. Yet, I think they are good ball park numbers. (Any real soldiers out there, please help me out!) I would assume that Tolkien had a very precise knowledge of the British Army in WWI (as all officers would), which would help garner a foundation for his military-related writings. (His descriptions in *Unfinished Tales* or of Númenorean organization and the Battles of the Fords of Isen, for example, bear my thought out.)

However, regarding Mr. Loback's elvish demographics, I'm not sure if I can entirely agree with the estimates here. I feel the numbers could be smaller. I know a story related to me by an extremely reliable source that the population of the elves is directly related to why they liked to reckon in 6's and 12's. Unfortunately, I cannot relate this story because my source tells me that the original source does not want this published. Perhaps someday this tale will come out. (I make a special entreaty here for the tale to come "public.")

Considering the problems of the US Census Bureau is having with counting real people, perhaps the audacious Mr. Loback should give our government a helping hand.

Rev. Canon Norman Power Birmingham, England

Here is a Tolkien oddity, a building in honor of Sam Gamgee, in a curious way I suppose you could say it was; though I doubt whether the people who built it named it had ever heard of Tolkien. The building is a rather ugly Office Block (nice people, though) for Birmingham's 'Hospital Saturday Fund' (sort of Medicare). It is also near my old church — St. John's Ladywood. The point is that this is opposite the end of Oliver Road, Ladywood, where Tolkien lived for a time as a boy. [See *Tolkien: a Biography* by Humphrey Carpenter, pp. 27-29]. In letters about the houses he's lived in he used to say this was the unhappy one of his two Ladywood homes. Here he was left with his brother when his mother died, just before Father Francis took the boys under his wing. In Oliver Road, a neighborhood of the Tolkiens, was a Doctor Gamgee. (The name is of Huguenot origin) who must have made an impression



on the boys. This doctor did, in fact, achieve world fame as the inventor of cotton wool. When he used this unlikely name in *LoR*, Tolkien invented complex derivations. This is the True one.

A sincere thank you to Canon Power for sending these two photographs from Tolkien's childhood home, Birmingham. Readers' photographs of Inklings related topics are most welcome to be shared here.

Dainis Biseneks

Philadelphia, PA

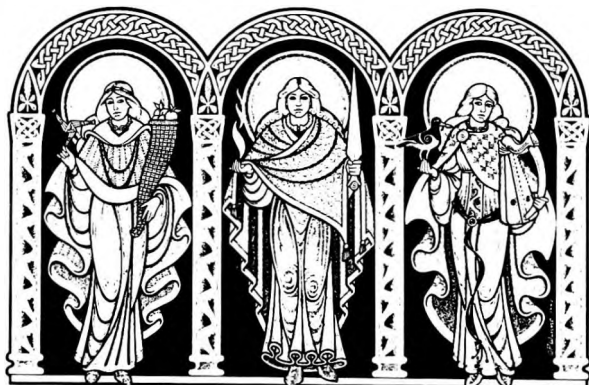
I continue to be astonished at the contributors' ability to describe, like Cuvier, a creature from a single bone; to make bricks with homeopathic amounts of straw. ...The best thing in Issue 62 is the letter by J.E.Kelson (who? from where?) on "LVIX." I find amusement from time to time in noticing Roman numerals on license plates; great would be my delight if I ever saw an equivalence like DLV-555.

Bettridge's article raises my hackles at many points; above all I would like to defend Merry and Pippin against the charge of remaining untouched. I say they were marked by their encounters with death and the Shadow; but when all was over, they emerged healed and whole. And, to be sure, youthfully exuberant.

Sam, on the other hand... Let us recall how seriously Tolkien took Sam's failure, his truculence at the "sneaking" Gollum. It would be interesting to ask on what testimony or inferential evidence we have this episode — *with Gollum's point of view!* — when Sam is most likely to have forgotten it as insignificant. But of course, in relation to its documentary sources — and behind them, What Really

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Happened — *LotR* is, exactly like Frank Herbert's *Dune*, a historical novel.

Have I ever in my life used the word "dichotomy"? I credit the early influence of Damon Knight's *In Search of Wonder*. I still blush to recall how, twenty years ago, I allowed more than two words in *-tion* to enter a single sentence

"Northrup" Frye? "Euripedes"? Proofread, proofread!

Your last point is well taken. I said in the last issue that I am aware of this problem and have taken steps to correct it. Sincere thanks to Sarah Beach for proofreading 95% of both this and the last issue. If errors still creep in, it is probably the very small amount that she didn't see. Several people have made the point that it is very difficult to proofread one's own typing; one misses the errors in the second or third reading that were made originally — and that is what we are now doing. — GG

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