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A Sacrilegious Opinion

Förord

Vi startade detta projekt i oktober förra året. Amanda skrev en längre jämförande text mellan Tolkiens originalverk *Sagan om ringen* och Peter Jacksons filmatisering av samma verk i form av en essä till vår tidskrift som hon kallade *A Sacrilegious Opinion*. På Redaktionen diskuterade vi hur den skulle få plats i Fontän, då vi inte ville dela upp den. Den måste läsas i sin helhet!

Hade vi, å andra sidan, tryckt in hela essän i tidskriften skulle andra texter knuffas ut. Alternativt hade vi fått trycka den i minimal text – vilket i sin tur krävt marknads skarpaste förstoringsglas.

Häng med oss på en guidad tur in i världens mest lästa bok jämte Bibeln!

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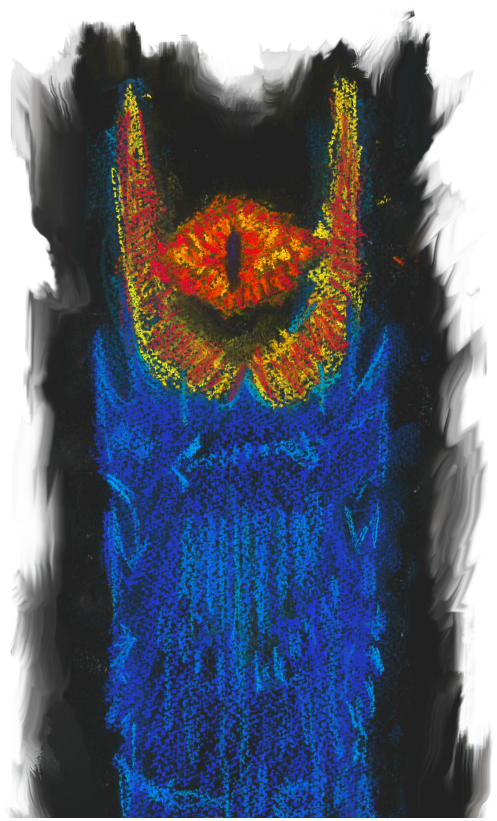
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My history with Tolkien is rocky. I began reading him in English when I was not yet good enough to grasp much, let alone appreciate his excellent use of language, and thus put him aside. When I began classifying myself as a writer of fantasy, I began to rebel against the assumptions that I must thus be writing about elves and dwarves and whatever.

Earlier this year, I decided to rewatch the extended version of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy directed by Peter Jackson, remembering very little besides the overarching story. I had ignored them since they were relatively new, and even then, I slept through most of it as I watched them on a slumber-party marathon which we started way too late.

Also this year, I began watching a sphere of YouTube which relishes critiquing what some refer to as woke media. The Amazon-produced series *The Rings of Power* is a prime target of theirs. The prevailing opinion is it being an atrocity, in part a product of the woke agenda of the writers and their disrespect for the source material. It is frequently compared to the Jackson trilogy, which is lauded for its respect and adherence. This served to build an expectation when I began reading the books, one that was quickly dashed; much of the praise lavished on the movies is inapplicable to the books.

I was struck in the face with the differences from the very beginning. By the time I reached the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the comparison between it and the movie was rampant, and though this chafes terribly against my ethos as a writer, I believe that the set of movies ... is the better piece of media. It is uncomfortable enough that I will here attempt to make my case, though far from all the many changes I will describe are favorable. If I sound defensive, it is because I am feeling very much so. I have garnered plenty of nasty looks from my fellow fantasy nerds upon telling them that I actively avoid Tolkien, and here I am, levying critique against him.



I have tried to structure myself somewhat chronologically, but it will be a hint messy, and pretty much every point will be a grand spoiler for both movies and books, and I will assume that more have seen the movies than have read the books.

I am afraid my confusion began early as I read, with the prologue. Upon re-watching the movies, I was surprised to find that all but Boromir of the fellowship survives to the end.

In a modern fantasy, especially post-*Game of Thrones*, at least one main hobbit would likely have died, for the feels. Perhaps Gimli or Legolas because of the emphasized strangeness of their friendship. Perhaps even Arwen, for that sweet, sweet irony.

I was astonished that the prologue makes clear that all four primary hobbits survive until certain conditions are met, along with Aragorn, and Faramir. Why on earth when dealing with an adventure would you remove the highest stakes from the table? No less than six characters have expressed plot armor from the get.

And it does not get much better from there very soon. To get some small critiques out of the way, I do feel that Tolkien is too trigger-happy with capitalizations, and too stingy with commas, but as he is consistent in their deployment, I cannot gripe about it too much. There are some I would just call poor choices, like giving a random fox intelligent thought and making an orc reference a picnic, but that is trivial enough that I am more upset that the scriptwriters did not know the definition of the word *whence*, (“from where”) when Tolkien used it correctly all the time.

There is also the occasional unintentionally humorous line, such as characters shaking their fist in anger, and Aragorn being described as springing away like a deer.

A bigger mistake, I feel, is when Tolkien likens one of Gandalf’s fireworks to an express train. Why, oh why, would a writer purposefully trying to imitate Old English to instill the right mood introduce modern imagery to the text? I daresay it is immersion breaking, because it makes me wonder at the identity of the narrator.

If I am generous, I would say that Tolkien wants us to think that the story is told from so far into the future that there might be express trains in Middle-earth, but that does not mesh with the rest of the story. And because of that train, questions of the narrator keep popping up, poking at the immersion. It can be put down to a mistake of a pioneer of an undeveloped genre, but I am not so sure.

Anyway, we come then quickly upon one of the biggest, and I believe deliberate, changes in the movies.



Frodo

At the beginning of the story, the night of Bilbo's party, Frodo himself is turning 33 years of age. When his adventure starts, he is just shy of 50. Frodo's character arc in the movies is cast somewhat like a coming-of-age story, as a journey from naïveté to experience.

However, in the books, though he has never left the Shire before, he has had frequent contact with the outside world, via visiting elves and dwarves, and not in the least, the far-travelling Bilbo and Gandalf. While many hobbits cannot read, Frodo can read elvish.

Happy birthday
BILBO BAGGINS



Upon rewatching the movies, I was looking for signs that I was wrong in my first impression, but Frodo is specifically referred to as young by other hobbits, so I do not feel bad about my assumption. I believe they have intentionally aged him down to make his arc more touching.

He is shown to be utterly unprepared for his task, and takes on the trip to Mordor only when he sees that the Ring causes chaos among the other races.

Pacing of the Fellowship

The second big change immediately apparent is the pacing. 17 years pass from when Frodo gets the Ring and Gandalf comes to tell him what it is, and they decide he must take it to Rivendell. But it isn't abruptly in the middle of the night because the enemy is coming, oh no.

He takes months to plan how to leave the Shire with as little notice as possible, even though Gandalf specifically says that they are under time pressure.

Furthermore, in the planning with Gandalf, the possibility of Frodo having to take it to Mordor comes up. I enjoy foreshadowing but here it only serves to undercut the pressure, the momentous moment of Frodo's sacrifice.

They discuss Gollum's background in detail, and how Saruman, though knowledgeable about magical rings, is not to be trusted anymore, though not because Gandalf suspects him of being a collaborator. Again, undercutting the drama.

Merry and Pippin

Just as Frodo has time to decide what to do, so do the other hobbits.

Pippin and Merry are described as his closest friends along with Sam, and they know that he is planning to leave in secret. Merry and Pippin are not dragged along because they happen to cross paths with Frodo and Sam, they conspire to go with them wherever.

Merry and Pippin are also subjected to an overhaul. They are not the thieving rascals of the movies, but respectable members of society. What I disliked the most about the book version of them is that they are somewhat homogenized. Pippin being the youngest, clocking in at 27, means that there is little difference between them.

In *The Fellowship*, the four are often described as experiencing the same emotions, or even the same thoughts. If Pippin were younger, it would be a more tangible point of difference. And I do not care that hobbits are considered adults at 33. "Mr. Peregrine" is treated as an adult by his fellow hobbits, for me pushing this rule of hobbit society into there just to be there.

The movies accomplish giving Merry and Pippin individual personalities off the bat along with personal struggles, when this begins to happen slowly in the second book. The movies even give us slight friction between the two when they part ways, which there is no time for in the books.



The One Ring

Yes, even the Ring has a different personality. The movies establish the dangers of the Master Ring from the beginning. The lure of it is so dangerous that Gandalf dares not touch it even once.

Its corrupting power is one of the driving forces of the plot, reinforced every time we hear it whispering in black speech. It must be destroyed as soon as possible not only to defeat Sauron, but because no one could withstand it for long, and by the end it is not soon enough, as Frodo fails against it.

Sure, the Ring is described as dangerous in the books as well, but I feel that the threat of it is consistently undermined, not the least by the several lengthy delays in the task to destroy it.

They take months to leave the Shire, they wallow for two days in an episode before reaching Bree understandably cut from the movie, they wait for months in Rivendell, and then yet again a month in Lothlórien after Moria.

The first time literary Frodo dons the Ring is not in the movie, and he does it for a stupid reason, after Tom Bombadil has briefly handled it (showing that it is harmless to him) to confirm that it is the Ring. It is a stupid reason, but furthermore, it has no effect on anyone at all. Wow, so dangerous.

In the movies, using the Ring comes with great cost, such as drawing the Ringwraiths, but not so in the books.

I do not really understand why the episode with Bombadil is included at all, and nothing about him serves a purpose for the story, his godlike powers providing little besides the need for exposition about why he cannot be trusted to keep the Ring from Sauron, so his exclusion from the movies along with that part of the story is seamless.

It makes me think that Tolkien was simply too pleased with that piece of world-building lore to cut it, and if that's the case ... Fair enough! Who hasn't been there?

Later on, upon reaching Rivendell, the encounter upon which the scene of Bilbo going goblin mode for the Ring is based, is terribly underwhelming and quickly resolved.

Bilbo is not moved to tears by the disfavor he has done to his adopted son. He is sorry and extremely happy-go-lucky about it, and I do not care that a seemingly carefree attitude is later said to be a common trait of hobbits.

Frodo fails to reflect on what will become of him if he keeps the Ring. In the books, Frodo complains that the Ring is a physical burden, and it eventually undermines his free will, but it is not corrupting him, while that quality is still the stated reason why no one should use it.

When Frodo offers to take it to Mordor, Tolkien could have added a line about an intrusive thought of desire to keep it mingled with the terror at the task. If someone else should take it, he would have to surrender it right away, showing that it already has a tight grip on him. If only he hadn't fuffed around with old Bombadil, eh?

The Fellowship

The fellowship is formed months after the arrival in Rivendell, and nothing interesting happens during that time. As a writer you become aware of some trade-offs you make. In order to give insight into a character or deepening the fabric of the world with lore, you must often sacrifice the tension of the plot. In the first book, Tolkien frequently lowers the pressure but gives little to no payoff, and I do not understand it; in an adventure, this is the last thing you want. There are no significant character interactions in Rivendell while they wait. I guess Boromir just sits uncharacteristically quietly in a corner waiting for people to get ready, for he is not mentioned at all.



I was astounded, for when watching the movies, I had managed to miss that Elrond explicitly tells the fellowship that they are bound by no promise to stick together.

In the book, Gimli expresses that if they swore an oath, the group might last longer, but that's about it. If I were Tolkien, my chief concern with the first book would be to make it heartbreaking when the fellowship breaks up, but instead it is "foreshadowed" and excused from the start. Gimli refrains from renewing his objection upon the event, or else we might have gotten some character-developing friction.

Aragorn

I must say that the changes to Aragorn are the most significant for me.

In the movies, he is unwilling to return to Gondor as king, it's a role he must come to accept. His arc is to unknowingly prove himself worthy of the title whilst on selfless quests. In the books, however, the Sword-that-was-Broken is reforged upon leaving Rivendell, eagerly adopted and renamed by Aragorn. His initial intent is to go with Boromir to Gondor!

Only when Gandalf dies does he feel torn to take the role as leader of the fellowship.

The books in general push hard on the divine right of the rulers. Their right to rule is often described in the same manner as wizards are when showing magical prowess. Aragorn thus already has all he needs to be king. In my opinion, this is a really boring reason to root for someone. I believe that the scriptwriters agreed with that, and so Aragorn displays his good qualities before he claims his right to rule. It feels justified.

In the books, it's just ... there. He's Isildur's heir, he has the sword, of course he should be king. Sure. It is interesting to note that Aragorn begins to whip out his divine right only after Boromir is dead, or else there might have been some juicy conflict of interest, as Boromir believes his father should be king, and thus he should also be, in turn. Now, we'll never know how he would respond.







Gandalf

Now, the changes to Gandalf are interesting in another way, because they fail to really *alter* anything about his archetype-shaping character.

In the movies, he doesn't want to go through Moria, gently foreshadowing his demise there.

In the books, it is Gandalf who pushes for Moria, because he has gone that way before. Gimli is receptive of the plan because nothing has been heard from the Moria dwarves for decades, but he doesn't suggest it like the movie version does for another reason entirely.

In essence, Gandalf's confidence is the reason for his "death."

It would have been interesting to have it confronted by anyone, rather than dismissed by Galadriel, as a possible mistake on his part.

I appreciate the change in the movies because, since Frodo ultimately makes the choice to go through Moria, it can be made out to be his fault, even though this is never made explicit. It further explains his motivation to leave the fellowship.

Gandalf's general infallibility is the same in both versions, making him not the most interesting, but he does have a spicy enough personality not to make him annoyingly powerful.

Moria

I appreciate that the movie transfers triumph over the door riddle of Moria from Gandalf to Frodo. It seems to me an homage to the books, and *the Hobbit*, because riddles play a key part, and is apparently held sacred, in hobbit culture.

Though the dwarven architecture is spectacularly described, there are some reasons that the Moria part in the book compares poorly. Among them, Frodo notices that they are pursued by Gollum. In part because the Ring and the wound from the Ringwraith are giving him extrasensory capabilities.

This representation of the everyman is strangely not disturbed by that.

But then again, in this world, just about anyone can have prophetic dreams.

Then, we don't get the epic cave-troll fight, though Frodo is "wounded," which brings us to the mithril coat of arms.

First, I do not understand why Frodo keeps it secret. Bilbo wants him to, but why though?

Second, I do not understand why Frodo's death is teased. Any reader of the prologue knows he is tagged with immortality.

Third, I do not understand why no one is upset that Frodo kept the armor secret. If I were in combat next to someone apparently impervious to chest wounds, I would like to know about it.

It is too easy to imagine that someone else would have gotten wounded from people rushing to come to Frodo's help, needlessly.

If I did not know any better, I would say that Tolkien wanted a shiny, happy plot device, maybe to soften us up for Gandalf. But again, we knew all along that Frodo survives. So, why?

The death scene is also much less dramatic in the books, I would say, and it has poorer scenography. Rather than clinging to the ledge, Gandalf calls for them to run as he plummets, which does not cut very deep.

I think the movie captures the profundity of the loss excellently.



Lothlórien

This part of the book is one of the most frustrating for me, because nothing happens. Yet again, our heroes are given a break, undermining the dire need to destroy the Ring. It also shows how underwhelming Tolkien's descriptions of elven architecture are. Well, I said nothing happens, but something does happen and it is even worse.

Legolas and Gimli become friends. Now, I am far from a show-don't-tell absolutist, but I strongly feel that Tolkien does not even bother to tell here. He lampshades this unexpected turn but says nothing about how or why. Because of this, I am not at all moved by any future displays of their BFF-hood. In the movies, Legolas voices their friendship toward the end, and by that time we have seen them behave as friends. It is even needless to say, but it is a sweet, rewarding moment.

At this point, I knew that if I were reading for enjoyment rather than for my edification, I would not. When turning to the book, you expect to get more details than the movie has runtime to provide. Too many times we just do not get anything.

I mean, elves are magical because they are elves, apparently. What happens beyond the sea, I have no clue.

I do not know what is so great about Galadriel or why Gimli becomes an instant creepy stan.

Furthermore, we are told that all the members of the fellowship experience visions of the future, which move them gravely. But we learn of none of them, apart from a little bit of Frodo and Sam.

We learn that Boromir is horribly shaken by his, but no more. And let us deal with him next.



Boromir

The narrator talks about Boromir like an honorable person. When he dies, we are supposed to be sad because he is good. And sure, I guess, if you say so. But is he, though?

He is strong; he moves snow, carries hobbits, and kills orcs. But personality-wise, he has done precious little besides being consistently contrary.

For example, it is a moody Boromir that disturbs the kraken-infested water outside Moria's gate, rather than bored, naïve hobbits. He complains about most plans, and then grudgingly goes along with them.

I guess that the scriptwriters also felt this lack in the text, for they invented scenes that make him actually sympathetic. Like, teaching the hobbits sword fighting, ending in an endearing rough-and-tumble. He implores Aragorn's sympathy for the hobbits after the loss of Gandalf, he encourages Frodo not to feel guilty about it.

Later on, he *somewhat* sides with Faramir against their father in a flashback.

And the book has little buildup to his betrayal, which is a shame as the paragraph describing it is one of my favorites.

*Almost he seemed to have forgotten Frodo, while his talk dwelt on walls and weapons,
and the mustering of men;
and he drew plans for great alliances and glorious victories to be;
and he cast down Mordor, and became himself a mighty king, benevolent and wise.*

Frodo instantly blames the Ring, but there is sparse support for this in the text. The movie foreshadows it on the mountain, but not the book, where it seems that Lothlórien alone was the trigger, not the mounting pressure of the Ring. In the movie, there is even more sympathy to be had for Boromir because he shares about his experience, and we learn that nothing short of the utter destruction of Gondor is enough to push him over the edge of betraying Frodo.

In the book, he is even short the excuse of only doing what his father told him, because he went to Rivendell of his own accord, rather than being sent there with orders from Denethor to bring it back to Gondor.

And then we do not even get to witness Boromir's last, redeeming act, defending Merry and Pippin. It counts for something that he confesses to Aragorn, but it is little to show his goodness. I am stuck on it because of the disconnect of what it feels like the narrator wants me to feel and what

I have actually read. Tolkien is in part known for the black-and-white view on good vs. evil so it doesn't feel right that Boromir hovers in the grey. If I were Tolkien, making Boromir's arc as tragic as possible would be another priority.

Frodo's secret parting from the group in the book is in general worse. Aragorn does not get his kingly moment to show that he is indeed a stronger man than Boromir, rejecting the Ring when Frodo offers it, which also removes that very telling moment of Frodo's despair at not being able to trust anyone. Merry and Pippin are robbed of their moment of heroism, drawing the attention of the orcs. And, as I said, we lose Boromir's last stand, and Aragorn's victory. In the movie, Boromir's death is a defining moment for Aragorn, a step on his journey to accepting his destiny.

It is much more moving than an elaborate scene of Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas improvising funeral rights for him, (all the while losing time in the hot pursuit of Merry and Pippin).



The Two Towers

Thankfully, the pace picks up from the very beginning of the second book, from here it is the movies that begin to insert days into the timeline here and there. Also, thankfully, the perspective is from here on split away from Frodo and Sam. The two of them are my least favorite part of the films, so I was glad to follow the others for half of book two.

The movies improve this even further, of course, by going back and forth between the different parties.

It is noteworthy that all of *The Fellowship* is centered on Frodo. We are clueless about what happened with Gandalf and Saruman until the meeting in Rivendell, and see nothing that happens away from Frodo. It is one reason that I would be too bored to continue the story at Lothlórien, as he is not the most interesting character by far, as Tolkien often fails to give insight into him, the protagonist.

Trade-Offs

The plight of Merry and Pippin at the hands of the orcs showed just what a difference was made to the characters. In the book, Pippin shows himself to be clever and brave, managing several feats while captive, rather than just shedding his leaf brooch seemingly magically without an orc spotting it. Even though he is not technically an adult, the literary version obviously has less growing up to do.

We also learn that there is more to Saruman in the books than in the movies. There is little to say about the ents other than they are much more interesting in the books.

There is so much new stuff added to the second movie that they obviously had to make economy in places, and it obviously happened to the cost of the ent and Saruman arcs.

This is when the literary Merry and Pippin comes into their own, so it is good that the movies establish their personalities elsewhere, even though those personalities are less interesting.

And there are plenty of additions here. None of the scenes with Arwen are from the books, nor those with Éowyn.



So, what did we gain and what did we lose?

In the books, spelled out close to the ending, Éowyn becomes infatuated with the idea of Aragorn, a king alongside whom she could fight and receive glory. Grima Wormtongue has managed to convince her that her life as princess is meaningless, and she is bruised when Aragorn rebuffs her offer. Which is completely different from the many scenes invented to create an actual, believable lopsided intimacy between the two.

I do not mind it as such, but I feel that it makes Éowyn too close to a silly girl falling for an emotionally unavailable man. It would be intolerable if he were definitely leading her on, even though he does tell her that Arwen is soon to be out of the picture. The worst effect is that it takes time from other parts of the story.

The movie's ents are basically just tree people, while in the book they have a rich history, interesting physiology, et cetera.

The worst injustice is done to Saruman, who in the movies is just another Sauron devotee. In the books, Saruman contrives how to get the Ring for himself, so that he can become master of the universe, shown in how his orcs interact with orcs from Mordor. It is also interesting how the movies make the orcs more black and white.

The literary orcs have names, personalities, and allegiances, while in the films they are basically stormtroopers.

Resurrection

Now. The return of Gandalf was my second great disappointment. And it is the second of Tolkien's greatly frustrating dismissals.

I came into this expecting to find out more about what happened to him. Previously, it was interesting to learn the few clues there were of the wizard order, such as color appearing to be a sort of ranking, including the Brown along with Grey and White. It was fascinating to think of the implications of Saruman forsaking the White in an attempt to master many colors.

But I come away from Gandalf's resurrection knowing no more about the process that apparently turned him from Grey to White. I suppose it is something that can happen when you fight Balrogs. Who knew?

And if you want to know what, specifically, is a Balrog, you came to the wrong place. Apparently, they are very old creatures which are not necessarily always on fire.

But it was really interesting, and significant, trust me, bro. It makes me think that Tolkien did not know how it works, it is merely a plot device to level up Gandalf.



No Elves at Helm's Deep

All the events leading up to Helm's Deep are somewhat different. Grima Wormtongue is more evil in the books, more cowardly, I believe, more corrupting. And Gandalf only has to get Théoden out in the sun to bring him back to himself.

Grima is let go freely and does no further harm as he arrives at Isengard too late to give any further information to Saruman, so we do not get to see him moved to tears when he is faced with the destruction of the kingdom he betrayed.

It is somewhat jarring that no time at all is dedicated to the fact that Théoden has lost his son, whilst in the movie, Théodred gets a funeral and appropriate lamentation.

Also, notably, it is Gandalf who infallibly suggests that some of the people of Rohan make a stand in Helm's Deep.

The battle itself is massively better in the movies. There is nothing lost on the architecture in general, and it is truly given the grandness the battle deserves.

In the book, we get very little of interest. It was also the point when the thought struck me that Legolas and Gimli provide mostly comic relief with their counting game. Of those two, we learn that Gimli likes caves and Legolas likes trees (I would never have guessed). Tolkien could seamlessly have put in a line that the two of them intend to go sightseeing after everything, like how they bonded in Lothlórien (if that's what happened, your guess is as good as mine).

I have seen barbs directed at Orlando Bloom's performance now and again, but I cannot fault him; he has precious little emotion to work with in the source material. For instance, his despair before Helm's Deep is not in book.

The elves of the books are in general quite disappointing to me, but that is because they feel over-hyped by the narrator and characters, and it feels like nothing really comes of it.

If, for instance, the literary Battle of Helm's Deep included elves, we could be moved by all those inflated, immortal, extraordinary lives coming to an end to extend the finite existence of some humans.

Maybe all of them had been heading for the ocean and blissful eternity, and instead chose to fight for the land they were leaving. It could have provided some extreme conflict for Legolas to overcome, something that drives his budding desire to cross the sea.

It would make more sense than him being driven by hearing the charming sound of gulls for the first time.

Instead, we get Legolas and Gimli being at best stereotypes of their species rather than actual characters. They certainly are the biggest letdown for me, as they are positioned as *main* characters.

I know that it is not a one-to-one exchange, but Tolkien never misses a chance to give beautiful, detailed descriptions of geography, but he fails to flesh out so many characters.

Half of the third book is appendices. Personally, I would rather his characters have character than to know how elvish is translated.



Saruman

I must say that the confrontation with Saruman of the books is fan-tas-tic, absolutely the best bit so far. And yet I understand why it's so inadequately represented in the movie. The magical persuasiveness of Saruman's voice could not have been represented on film without a lot of perhaps annoying exposition.

Those who listened unwarily to that voice could seldom report the words that they heard; and if they did, they wondered, for little power remained in them.

Mostly they remembered only that it was a delight to hear the voice speaking, all that it said seemed wise and reasonable, and desire awoke in them by swift agreement to seem wise themselves.

And since they excluded all the nuance of Saruman's villainy, I understand why they just chose not to make the attempt to show that side of him.

I vaguely remember a slight fuss when the movies released, and it was revealed that Saruman dies prematurely. I was really interested to see what would come of him; however, I do say that his continued existence is pure degradation of the character. A swan dive off the Orthanc is a much worthier end.

At this point, I, to my dismay, realized that it was time for Frodo and Sam.

I was less than enthused for the coming few hundred pages since I find Sam's struggle with Gollum over Frodo to be nothing short of provoking to watch. But little did I know I needed not worry, because that *does not happen in the book*.

Gollum

Let's confront the Gollum issue here, then, because I believe it is the gravest fumble of the movies vs. books. I believe that in the same way as the screenwriters gave Aragorn an arc, they wanted to give one to Gollum, one of the main adversaries of the story.

Off the bat, I liked the literary version better, for I felt less force-fed the ghost of Frodo's Christmas future. What Gollum represents is still spelled out, don't you fret, but much more prettily, in a way which is very nicely mirrored later, when the Ring has taken over.

For a moment it appeared to Sam that his master had grown and Gollum had shrunk: a tall stern shadow, a mighty lord who hid his brightness in grey cloud, and at his feet a little whining dog. Yet the two were in some way akin and not alien: they could reach one another's minds.

This whole section with Gollum also showcases the changes made to Frodo's character. In the movie he is defensive of Gollum against Sam. In the books, he is generous, sure, but he does not hesitate to threaten Gollum with violence, or with the Ring when he refuses to cooperate.

The narrator is open with the change in Gollum after he swears to be good only being temporary, again lowering the tension for the reader. Gollum might want to be seen as good, but he is not.

In the movies, it is presented as tragedy. After receiving kindness, Gollum is able to with pure willpower exorcise his centuries-persistent bad side, and it is only brought back after Frodo betrays him to be abused by Faramir. This is stupid. It would feel like a contrivance either way, but this was not one of Tolkien's.

In the book, the scheme to bring Frodo and Sam to the giant spider is hatched *before* they encounter Faramir.



Gollum is mildly manhandled by the humans, but he is treated with respect by Faramir, and Frodo demonstratively protects him. It even occurs to Frodo for an instant to let Faramir's men kill Gollum in the pool, humanizing him, for who wouldn't loathe being dependent on someone like Gollum? Frodo is sympathetic toward Gollum, but never to the extent of turning him against his beloved Sam. As it should be.

Faramir

Faramir is another example of a character being reduced to one of their functions, like Saruman. Literary Faramir is very different from his movie representation.

In the books, he is instantly shown to have all of Boromir's good qualities, being strong and brave. He is also shown to have the confidence of those he leads. On top of that, he is intelligent and judicious. Boromir plus, in general. He also has a sober view of his brother; he loved him, of course, but knows his shortcomings.

The interactions with Faramir are all excellent, and they show that Tolkien is able to build tension (and apparently chose not to most of the time) with the will-he-won't-he question about the Ring all the while Faramir's nature is unsure.

We see how his thoughts work through the possibilities that come with the Ring when Sam makes the mistake of sharing about it in casual conversation. Most of this line is included in the movie, though given a drastically different mood.

“So it seems,” said Faramir, slowly and very softly, with a strange smile. “So that is the answer to all the riddles! The One Ring that was thought to have perished from the world. And Boromir tried to take it by force? And you escaped? And came all the way – to me! And here in the wild I have you: two halflings, and a host of men at my call, and the Ring of Rings. A pretty stroke of fortune! A chance for Faramir, Captain of Gondor, to show his quality. Ha!” He stood up, very tall and stern, his grey eyes glinting.

But Faramir is stronger than his brother, choosing to honor the reassurances

he gave Frodo, and then he is not needlessly cruel to Gollum. He does not believe in survival at all costs. He is, obviously, one of the good ones, sending Frodo on his way.

I am torn about the movies' decision to boil him down to his perceived inferiority to Boromir, but I understand it since it is the trait necessary to at all explain his father's eagerness to send him to his death.

His eagerness to die is underpinned by the movie-version's failure to deliver the Ring to his father, going against expressed instructions to Boromir to acquire it, which never happened in the books. Something undeniable to me is that it is horribly overwrought. We do *not* need to be constantly reminded that Denethor favored Boromir and how much that sucks for Faramir.



Shelob

As the pair nears Mordor, the pressure of the Ring at long last actually begins to show, making Frodo do things against his will, though this is due to the proximity to Sauron rather than accumulative from carrying the Ring. Before his betrayal, we also get a *believably* tragic, humanizing moment of Gollum.

For a fleeting moment, could one of the sleepers have seen him, they would have thought that they beheld an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing.



In the book, we learn not only that the name of the giant spider is Shelob, we get more backstory on her than we ever got on Legolas or Gimli, which I am not at all bitter about.

Inadequate Parenting

Minas Tirith looks as impressive on screen as it is described. I do like Pip-pin's arc in the books, but I understand why it is shortened. More time is dedicated to the actual siege than its buildup.

The movies again manufacture tension by indicating first that Théoden might not go to the help of Gondor, and then making Denethor too proud and distracted by his oncoming doom to call for help, neither of which is in the book, which makes more sense.

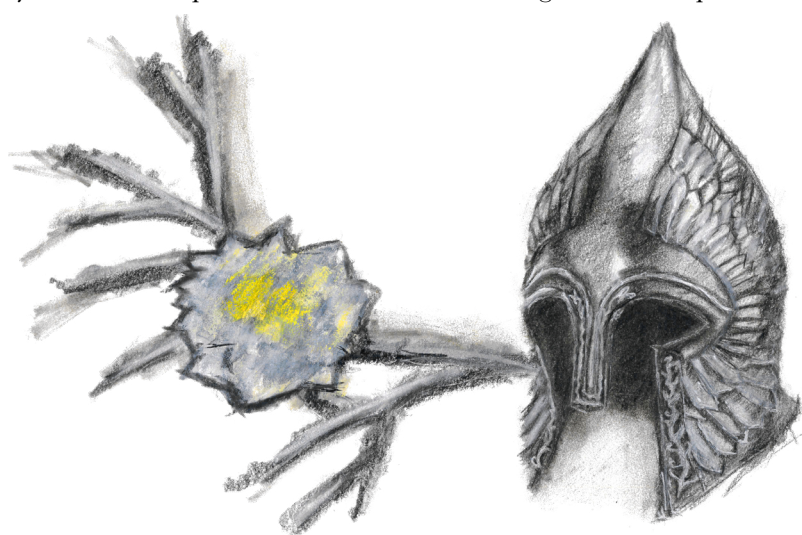
And Denethor ... While John Noble does a brilliant job portraying him as a father deranged by grief, that is not my experience of the literary character. The choice to portray Faramir primarily with an inferiority complex feels somewhat like they're trying to give Denethor an out.

If Faramir is, in fact, inferior to his brother, then Denethor might have had *some* foundation for his preference for Boromir.

The literary Faramir is demonstratively not inferior to his brother. Denethor is obviously in the wrong, apparently disliking that Faramir listens a little to Gandalf. (Obviously, he should be replaced by a ruler with divine right.) To me, he's just a shitty parent.

The interesting part is that any anguish on Faramir's part is not explicit in the text, besides him asking his father to think better of him after his suicide mission, so it is notable that it is the trait the scriptwriters chose to center the character around.

Though anyone who read the prologue has no reason to fear for Faramir, but maybe Tolkien hoped that the reader would forget about his plot armor.





It does illustrate the lack of emotion in the books, such as Théoden's lacking grief for his son's death. It deserves due attention, as does Faramir's leading a band of men to their deaths.

I genuinely do not understand how there is not even a throwback to Théodred when Théoden starts referring to his nephew as his son. It is to establish succession, sure, but come on. I would even have thought that he would care about proving himself a better man than he was a father to his son in the end, rather than being worthy of his forebears. Oh, well.

The movies tend toward feeling overdramatized, but the lack in the text is so notable that I prefer the excess of drama to the illogic of its absence.

Portraying Faramir as an inferior little brother rather than beloved by his people and competent to rule does fit since the movie skips over the gymnastics to make the people blindly accept Aragorn as king.

In the books, Faramir is simply wise enough to recognize someone possessing more divine right than he does.

The Siege of Minas Tirith

Just as with Helm's Deep, the Siege of Minas Tirith is grander in the movie, more impressive (discounting Legolas' oliphant surfing). The one thing which is much better in the books is Éowyn's moment of glory. If you want a nice, balanced girl boss, look no further.

The reason why she is the one to kill the king of the Nazgûl is that she alone is brave enough to face him and his dinosaur – with a little help from Merry – not because “she is no man.”

I was a hint apprehensive that it would be Merry who killed him since hobbits are explicit-



ly said not to be “Men,” as in human, but no, it originates with Éowyn.

And here is explained an episode way back in the first stage of the journey, not included in the movies.

I had been wondering what the damned point of it was, and why it is referenced once in a while, but it actually plays a role. You have to admire a writer confident enough to put 50 chapters between a setup and its fruition. Hats off, well played, good sir.

It is a much more satisfying solution than cringey, pseudo-feminist wordplay.

Endgame

The final thrust of the struggle is very good, I think. Many times have I seen memes presenting exceedingly simple solutions to destroy the Ring, and I find them invalid. The hobbits could not simply have ridden the eagles to Mount Doom. Duh.

It all comes together.

At the book’s final confrontation with Sauron’s mouthpiece, whom we again get plenty of details about, I lack one of the best lines of the movies, when he bluffs about Frodo’s death, presenting his mithril armor, but that is just one example of how good the screenwriters usually are when imitating Tolkien. They are obviously not just passing out memberberries to the fans. Whenever the books are cited, it makes sense, even if the words are transposed in time, or put in someone else’s mouth.

Sauron’s final moments are described in detail and they are satisfying. Then it starts to get a hint dragged out in five further chapters. Despite having some complications, the ever after is very happy indeed.

Final Verdict

So. After finishing reading the Fellowship, I was firm in my belief that the movies did it better, none too surprising as the first movie happens to be the best one.

And when I was done? Taking into account the fact that my three favorite literary characters are stripped of their interesting characteristics in the films

and Gollum being poorly handled ... I still think the movies come out ahead.

Apart from all the points I have made, Aragorn is obviously the protagonist of his part of the story, and him having an arc makes all the difference in the world. Inadvertently proving himself deserving is so much more satisfying than magical divine right.

In the books, he has done all his consequential growing before the events start, which makes sense with his ripe age, but it is still boring. Somewhere along the line, I have been conditioned to feel that a personal arc is not only preferable but *necessary*.

I want an internal conflict to become externalized, to be conquered, failed, or subverted. In the book, Aragorn is torn about taking Gandalf's place, but he never even has to make a choice about it.

Tolkien once said that he wanted to write a mythology worthy of Britain, and his characters are reminiscent of what I know of mythology. The mythological figures are static in what they represent, and limited in what concepts they convey.

Along with Boromir's greater impact, Arwen being an active character (albeit an unfortunately passive one), the higher pace, the increased presence of the Ring and the invention of the Eye, the perfectly stunning visuals, brilliant cast, and the legendary musical score, it is clear cut.

Not to mention the better fight scenes and the grandness of the battles.

That is not to say that the books are in any way bad, they just compare unfavorably. Throughout, my eyes kept straying to the page number, wanting them to rise faster, and I was plain resentful of the appendices, accompanied by a feeling that this was not written for me.

On that subject, if something is superfluous to the main body, why is it there? I refuse to accept that Tolkien lacked the skill to weave any necessary information into the story, as he did with so much else.

To repurpose a sentiment from another kind of movie classic: author outranks audience, at least when it comes to what information the reader needs to have. And that is all discounting the displeasure of seeing an asterisk in prose.

Not fully explaining everything I want explained is hardly cardinal of him, but I do feel, in my heart of hearts, that the fault in Tolkien's rendition is one of neglected opportunities, opportunities ripe to be seized by an adaptation.

And Back Again

When I think about what started me on this game of Spot the Difference, I think it's supreme irony that the set of books I ordered (after starting with library books) turned out to be plastered with advertisements for *The Rings of Power*.

And it is clear to me at least, that the Jackson trilogy was also subjected to wokeness, in the shape it took at the time. I would be astonished if the writer room was absent the observation that there are very few scenes focusing on female characters.

Would you be surprised to know that Arwen is not shown interacting with anyone until the drawn-out ending? That Éowyn becomes infatuated with Aragorn after one shared glance in *The Two Towers*, that there are no further interactions between them in that book because she does not go to Helm's Deep? No wonder that scenes were invented for their benefit.

They had to push Éowyn earlier in the movies because the interesting parts with her are basically cut from the script. She is better in the books, but I understand the choices made. I will leave it at saying that she and Faramir are well worthy of each other, absolutely solid ship, I'm glad it's canon.

My conclusion is that it is perfectly fine to make changes to a beloved intellectual property, if the changes are good, or at least executed with some humility.

If you love the movies, I am sure there is something in the books for you. I recommend keeping your expectations in check, and do not count on your favorite part to be there.



