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THE DENETHOR QUESTION

On Despair, the Burden of Stewardship, and the Difference Between Recognizing Danger and Surrendering the Future

A Continuing Inquiry into the Responsibilities of Leadership Under Overwhelming Threat, the Interpretation of Information Obtained Through the Palantír of Anor, the Limits of Paternal and Political Authority, and the Obligations Owed to Those Whose Futures Have Not Yet Been Determined

Office of Improbable Jurisdiction
November 14, 2026

NOTICE OF CONTINUING INVESTIGATION

The Office of Improbable Jurisdiction hereby continues its inquiry into the consequences of extraordinary power, adversarial communication, and the exercise of authority under conditions of profound uncertainty.

The present proceeding concerns Denethor II, Ruling Steward of Gondor.

The Office acknowledges an immediate jurisdictional distinction.

Denethor was a mortal Man.

He was not numbered among the Maiar.

His authority did not arise from the commission examined in the Istari Mandate.

Nevertheless, his conduct became materially connected with the actions of Sauron, whose influence upon information obtained through the palantíri was considered in the preceding investigation.

His final decisions also occasioned direct intervention by Gandalf, whose responsibilities remain within the scope of the Maiar Accountability Record.

The Office therefore considers the present inquiry appropriately related to its continuing proceedings.

No finding is entered that Denethor was subject to the Istari Mandate.

Nor does the Office presume that the authority of the Stewards of Gondor was equivalent to that of the Wizards.

The distinction is preserved.

The Office further acknowledges that Denethor occupied a position of extraordinary responsibility.

He governed a kingdom threatened by an adversary possessing power beyond that of ordinary mortal rulers.

He understood dangers that others might underestimate.

He possessed considerable intelligence, historical knowledge, and political experience.

He had spent many years preparing for the possibility of war.

He had endured the death of his wife.

He had lost his elder son.

And he confronted the possibility that his surviving son, his city, and the kingdom entrusted to his care might soon be destroyed.

These circumstances were real.

The armies of Mordor were real.

The threat to Minas Tirith was real.

The suffering of Gondor's people was real.

The possibility of defeat was not imaginary.

The Office does not propose to dismiss Denethor's fears merely because the conclusion toward which those fears led proved mistaken.

Nor does it consider despair a moral defect simply because another person might have retained hope.

A leader may become exhausted.

A father may grieve.

A person may reach the limits of endurance.

None of these circumstances, considered alone, establishes wrongdoing.

Nevertheless, the Office distinguishes the experience of despair from the exercise of authority upon its basis.

A ruler may believe that defeat is inevitable.

The belief does not necessarily establish the outcome.

A father may fear that his child will die.

The fear does not establish that the child's life has ended.

A steward may conclude that the institution entrusted to his care cannot survive.

The conclusion does not automatically confer authority to destroy what remains.

The recognition of danger is a responsibility of leadership.

The declaration that no future remains is a different matter.

The present inquiry therefore examines Denethor's conduct without reducing his life to its final hours.

His earlier service must be recognized.

His legitimate responsibilities must be considered.

His grief must not be dismissed.

His political convictions must not be mistaken for the whole of his character.

And the consequences of his final decisions for persons other than himself must remain visible.

The Office enters the following preliminary principle:

A person entrusted with the future of others does not acquire ownership of that future merely because its preservation has become uncertain.

The inquiry proceeds.

I. On the Nature of Stewardship

The Office first considers the authority held by Denethor.

The Ruling Stewards of Gondor exercised government during the long absence of a reigning king.

Their office carried substantial responsibilities.

They administered the realm.

Maintained its defenses.

Preserved its institutions.

Commanded its forces.

And made decisions whose consequences extended far beyond their private interests.

The Office recognizes that these powers were legitimate.

The Stewards were not merely ceremonial guardians awaiting the convenience of a restored monarchy.

They governed a living kingdom.

Nevertheless, the nature of their office deserves examination.

A steward exercises responsibility for something not possessed in an unrestricted personal capacity.

The office may confer authority.

It may require difficult judgments.

It may demand sacrifice.

But it does not establish that the institution exists solely for the person administering it.

Stewardship is not ownership.

The distinction remains applicable even where an office has been held by successive generations of one family.

Continuity may provide stability.

It may preserve knowledge.

It may establish trust.

It may also encourage the holder of an office to regard the institution's survival as inseparable from the continuation of personal authority.

The Office does not presume that Denethor consciously confused these matters throughout his life.

It does find that the relationship between Gondor's future and his own position became increasingly important to his judgment.

The possible return of a king presented questions of legitimacy and political continuity.

Denethor's concerns regarding that return were not identical to his fears concerning Sauron.

Nor were they entirely separable from his understanding of Gondor's future.

The Office considers the distinction significant.

The defeat of an enemy may preserve a kingdom while changing the institutions through which the kingdom is governed.

Such a change may be unwelcome to the person presently exercising authority.

It does not follow that the people governed have thereby lost their future.

A kingdom may continue beyond the person who governs it.

Indeed, the preservation of that possibility is among the purposes for which responsible government exists.

The Office therefore rejects the proposition that the loss of an office, however painful to its holder, constitutes the loss of the people whose interests the office was created to serve.

II. On the Burden of Gondor

The Office next considers the conditions under which Denethor exercised authority.

Gondor had long confronted the threat of Mordor.

Its danger was neither sudden nor imaginary.

Its borders required defense.

Its military resources were finite.

Its alliances were consequential but uncertain.

And its rulers were required to make decisions without complete knowledge of the enemy's intentions.

Denethor inherited responsibility for a kingdom whose difficulties could not be resolved through ordinary administrative adjustments.

The Office recognizes the weight of this burden.

Leadership during prolonged war requires decisions that may remain morally difficult even when strategically justified.

A commander may be required to allocate insufficient resources.

To withdraw from a defensible position.

To maintain another at terrible cost.

To accept the possibility of casualties.

Or to choose between alternatives none of which can guarantee safety.

The Office does not presume that such decisions are simple.

Nor does it propose to judge them solely through knowledge of their eventual consequences.

A decision that fails is not necessarily evidence that the original judgment was unreasonable.

A decision that succeeds is not necessarily evidence that every risk undertaken was justified.

The outcome of a decision does not establish, by itself, the quality of the judgment through which it was reached.

The Office therefore declines to treat every loss suffered by Gondor as evidence of failure by its Steward.

It likewise declines to infer that Denethor could have prevented every danger had he possessed greater wisdom.

Such conclusions would exceed the evidence.

Nevertheless, the difficulty of leadership does not eliminate the obligations associated with it.

Where choices remain possible, they must be examined.

Where uncertainty remains, it must not be concealed.

And where the consequences of judgment will be borne by others, the authority to decide requires particular care.

The Office considers these principles applicable even under conditions of war.

Especially under conditions of war.

III. On the Intelligence of the Steward

The Office now considers Denethor's intellectual capacities.

The surviving accounts describe a man of considerable intelligence, strength of will, and political experience.

He possessed extensive knowledge of Gondor's history.

He understood the dangers facing the kingdom.

He was capable of strategic judgment.

He was neither an accidental ruler nor an incapable administrator.

The Office considers these qualifications important.

An inquiry that begins by assuming Denethor was always foolish cannot adequately explain the significance of his eventual errors.

It also risks concealing the broader danger presented by the case.

For Denethor's tragedy was not simply that an ignorant ruler misunderstood events.

It was that a knowledgeable ruler came to regard certain conclusions as more final than the evidence permitted.

The Office therefore distinguishes between intelligence and immunity from error.

A person may possess exceptional analytical ability.

The person may correctly identify substantial dangers.

The person may understand history more thoroughly than those offering advice.

Nevertheless, judgment remains vulnerable to fear, grief, exhaustion, pride, and incomplete information.

These vulnerabilities do not necessarily eliminate intelligence.

Nor does intelligence eliminate them.

The ability to understand a danger does not establish the ability to endure every consequence of understanding it.

The Office further observes that confidence in one's knowledge may gradually diminish the willingness to receive correction.

A ruler accustomed to recognizing danger before others perceive it may come to regard disagreement as evidence of inferior judgment.

A leader who has repeatedly been right may begin to assume that future disagreement is equally mistaken.

An institution that depends heavily upon one person's judgment may eventually lose the practical capacity to challenge that judgment.

The Office does not conclude that every such circumstance applied equally to Denethor.

It does find substantial grounds for examining the relationship between his intelligence, his pride, and his increasing isolation.

The questions are not accusations of stupidity.

They are questions concerning the limits of wisdom.

IV. On the Stone of Anor

The Office now returns to the palantír held at Minas Tirith.

The preceding Palantír Question established that the seeing-stones were capable of revealing genuine information while remaining vulnerable to misleading interpretation.

Denethor employed the Anor-stone during a period of extraordinary danger.

The Office recognizes that his position as Ruling Steward gave him a legitimate claim to its use.

His access was not equivalent to that of an unauthorized observer.

Nor does the Office accept the proposition that contact with Sauron rendered Denethor a mindless instrument of the Dark Lord.

The surviving accounts describe a more complicated relationship.

Denethor possessed formidable strength of will.

He was not simply compelled to believe arbitrary falsehoods.

He perceived genuine circumstances.

He acquired information of considerable strategic importance.

And he resisted direct domination by an adversary whose power exceeded his own.

Nevertheless, the conditions under which the information was obtained were not neutral.

Sauron possessed both motive and means to influence what Denethor understood.

The Office therefore distinguishes the legitimacy of access from the reliability of the conclusions drawn through that access.

Authorized access does not guarantee an uncompromised understanding.

The distinction is substantial.

An instrument may function as intended.

The information received may be accurate.

The user may possess legitimate authority.

And the resulting judgment may nevertheless be profoundly mistaken.

The Office further observes that the dangers of adversarial information are not confined to fabricated evidence.

A hostile participant may influence another's understanding by directing attention toward genuine threats while leaving other relevant circumstances unseen.

The observer may acquire more information than before.

The observer may become more knowledgeable concerning the enemy's strength.

And yet the resulting understanding may become less complete.

The possession of more evidence does not necessarily correct an interpretation that excludes possibilities the observer has ceased to consider.

The Office does not conclude that Denethor should have remained ignorant of the enemy.

It recognizes the necessity of intelligence gathering.

It finds instead that extraordinary information did not relieve him of the responsibility to distinguish observation from prediction.

The Stone could reveal danger.

It could not establish that the future had already occurred.

V. On the Ships That Were Seen

The Office now considers a particularly consequential example of incomplete information.

Denethor perceived the approach of ships bearing the black sails associated with the Corsairs of Umbar.

The sight was genuine.

The ships existed.

Their approach was significant.

Under ordinary circumstances, such a fleet would have represented a grave danger to Gondor.

Nevertheless, the appearance of the vessels did not establish who then controlled them or the purpose for which they were approaching.

Aragorn's intervention had altered the circumstances.

The ships no longer represented the threat their appearance might reasonably have suggested.

Denethor did not possess a complete understanding of this development.

The Office considers the episode an especially clear example of the distinction examined in the Palantír Question.

An accurate observation may support a disastrous conclusion when the circumstances necessary to interpret it remain unseen.

The Office does not suggest that Denethor was irrational merely because he considered the ships dangerous.

Such an interpretation possessed substantial grounds.

The error arose when the apparent significance of the observation became further evidence that Gondor's defeat was inevitable.

The ships were real.

The black sails were real.

The presumed conclusion did not follow necessarily from either.

The Office therefore distinguishes reasonable apprehension from unwarranted finality.

A ruler may prepare for the worst.

The ruler may take precautions.

The ruler may warn others.

The ruler may reasonably conclude that defeat is likely.

But preparation for a possible catastrophe does not establish that the catastrophe has already occurred.

The seriousness of a danger does not eliminate the difference between what may happen and what has happened.

The Office considers this distinction especially important where the proposed response would be irreversible.

VI. On the Burden of Continuous Vigilance

The Office now considers whether extraordinary access to information creates corresponding demands upon the person receiving it.

A ruler responsible for the defense of a kingdom may reasonably seek extensive knowledge concerning approaching threats.

Delayed information may cost lives.

Ignorance may prevent preparation.

Failure to identify an enemy's movements may expose entire communities to danger.

Nevertheless, the continuous acquisition of threatening information may produce burdens of its own.

Attention is finite.

Endurance is finite.

Judgment may deteriorate under prolonged exhaustion.

And repeated exposure to danger may alter the observer's understanding of what remains possible.

The Office does not propose a clinical diagnosis of Denethor.

Nor does it suggest that every experience of despair results from excessive exposure to information.

It does, however, recognize that prolonged vigilance under conditions of severe threat may impair the judgment of capable individuals.

The ability to perceive danger continuously does not establish an unlimited capacity to endure that perception without consequence.

The Office further observes that leadership may discourage the acknowledgment of vulnerability.

A commander may fear that requesting relief will appear weak.

A ruler may regard uncertainty as a threat to public confidence.

An institution may become dependent upon the appearance that its leader can withstand every demand.

Such expectations may deepen isolation.

They may also encourage the institution to overlook signs that its decision-making arrangements have become dangerously dependent upon one individual.

The Office therefore considers the welfare of persons exercising authority a legitimate institutional concern.

This does not exempt those persons from responsibility.

It recognizes that judgment requires conditions under which judgment can remain possible.

An institution that demands inexhaustible vigilance from a single person may eventually discover that the person's exhaustion has become a danger to everyone else.

The Office enters no finding that Denethor's knowledge was itself the problem.

It finds that knowledge without sufficient opportunities for correction, assistance, and relief may become an increasingly hazardous basis for consequential decisions.

VII. On Boromir and the Grief That Remained

The Office now considers the death of Boromir.

Boromir was Denethor's elder son.

He was a captain of Gondor.

His death occurred during the events preceding the siege of Minas Tirith.

The Office recognizes the significance of this loss.

Denethor did not merely receive news concerning the death of a soldier.

He learned of the death of his son.

A person does not cease to be a father merely because he is also a steward.

The Office further recognizes that Denethor had experienced earlier bereavement.

The death of his wife, Finduilas, formed part of the history through which his later life must be understood.

The Office does not propose to construct a complete psychological explanation of his conduct through these losses.

Such an explanation would exceed the evidence.

Nevertheless, the losses were real.

They affected a man who continued to bear extraordinary responsibility.

The Office therefore rejects an interpretation that treats Denethor's grief as an inconvenience to be dismissed before examining his decisions.

It also rejects the opposite error.

The legitimacy of grief does not establish the legitimacy of every action undertaken while grieving.

A person may suffer profoundly.

The suffering may deserve compassion.

The person's judgment may become impaired.

But the suffering does not automatically confer authority to impose its consequences upon the lives of others.

Grief may explain the circumstances of a decision without making the decision just.

The Office considers this distinction especially important where the grieving individual possesses power over persons who remain alive.

VIII. On Faramir and the Son Who Remained

The Office now considers Faramir.

Following Boromir's death, Faramir remained Denethor's surviving son and heir.

He was also a military officer entrusted with substantial responsibilities.

The Office recognizes that Faramir was not merely an extension of his father's office.

He possessed judgment of his own.

He exercised authority.

He held convictions and loyalties that were not necessarily identical to Denethor's.

The Office therefore distinguishes paternal authority, military command, and the independent person upon whom both might be exercised.

These relationships may overlap.

They are not interchangeable.

A father may counsel his son.

A commander may issue orders to a subordinate.

A steward may assign responsibilities to an officer.

Nevertheless, the existence of these relationships does not eliminate the need to examine the purposes and consequences of authority.

The Office recognizes that Denethor and Faramir differed in judgment.

Their relationship was complicated by expectation, grief, pride, and unequal expressions of affection.

The Office does not propose to reduce that relationship to a simple absence of love.

Nevertheless, the reality of affection does not eliminate the possibility of harm.

Love may be genuine without making every act undertaken in its name protective.

Nor does the existence of a family relationship establish that one member's future belongs to another.

The Office considers this distinction essential.

Faramir's life mattered beyond his father's expectations.

It mattered beyond his military duties.

It mattered beyond the question of succession.

He was not merely the remaining representative of a family line.

He was a person whose future had not yet been determined.

IX. On the Assignment of Danger

The Office next examines the military responsibilities placed upon Faramir during the defense of Gondor.

The surviving accounts describe circumstances of increasing military danger.

The approaches to Minas Tirith were contested.

The forces of Mordor were advancing.

The available resources of Gondor were limited.

Decisions concerning the defense of Osgiliath and the approaches to the city carried grave consequences.

Denethor possessed legitimate authority to direct military operations.

The Office does not dispute that authority.

Nor does it presume that assigning a dangerous mission to a military officer constitutes misconduct merely because the mission involves substantial risk.

War presents circumstances in which dangerous assignments cannot always be avoided.

Nevertheless, the Office considers the distinction between military necessity and personal judgment material.

A decision may be supported by strategic circumstances.

It may also be influenced by pride, resentment, disappointment, or grief.

These influences do not automatically render the decision improper.

But where another person's life is placed at substantial risk, they deserve examination.

The Office therefore asks whether the available alternatives were adequately considered and whether the assignment reflected a defensible assessment of military necessity.

It acknowledges that the surviving record does not permit a complete reconstruction of every operational consideration.

It will not invent a superior battle plan merely to condemn the one adopted.

Nevertheless, the condition in which Faramir returned is beyond dispute.

He was gravely wounded.

He was fevered.

His capacity to protect his own interests was diminished.

Whatever the justification for the military decisions preceding his injury, the circumstances had changed.

He required care.

A dangerous assignment does not become a completed obligation merely because the person performing it has been carried home.

The duty to protect the injured remains.

The Office considers this principle applicable regardless of whether the original assignment was justified.

X. On the Difference Between Despair and Judgment

The Office now addresses Denethor's growing conviction that Gondor could not survive.

The danger was grave.

The enemy possessed overwhelming strength.

The city was threatened.

Faramir's condition was desperate.

And the consequences of defeat were terrible to contemplate.

The Office recognizes these circumstances.

It does not dismiss Denethor's despair because another person might have retained hope.

Nor does it suggest that optimism is a duty imposed upon those who suffer.

A person may lose hope without thereby committing a wrong.

The Office considers this distinction fundamental.

Hope cannot always be commanded.

It cannot necessarily be restored through argument.

A person experiencing extraordinary loss may become unable to imagine a favorable future.

Such suffering may deserve understanding rather than condemnation.

Nevertheless, the Office distinguishes the private experience of despair from the exercise of authority upon its basis.

A ruler may believe that defeat is inevitable.

The ruler remains responsible for recognizing the difference between that belief and an established fact.

A father may fear that his child cannot survive.

The fear does not establish that the child's life has ended.

A steward may consider the future of a kingdom lost.

The steward does not thereby acquire ownership of the future that remains to its people.

The right to despair is not the right to make despair compulsory.

The Office considers this distinction central.

The issue is not whether Denethor was required to feel hopeful.

He was not.

The issue is whether his conviction that no future remained justified actions intended to prevent others from continuing into that future.

The Office finds that it did not.

XI. On the House of the Stewards

The Office now considers the events in the House of the Stewards.

Denethor ordered preparations for a funeral pyre.

He intended to die.

He also intended that Faramir, then gravely ill but still living, should perish with him.

The Office recognizes the gravity of these circumstances.

It further recognizes that Denethor's conduct occurred amid extraordinary grief, exhaustion, and the apparent collapse of the world he had spent his life defending.

The Office will not reduce that grief to a rhetorical device.

Nor will it presume to know every thought that passed through Denethor's mind.

Nevertheless, the distinction between his own intended death and the intended death of his son is decisive.

Faramir remained alive.

His condition was grave.

His future was uncertain.

His capacity to object was compromised.

His inability to resist did not constitute consent.

The Office considers this principle applicable regardless of the status of the person directing the act.

A father possesses responsibilities toward a child.

Those responsibilities do not include unrestricted authority to determine that the child's life has ceased to be worth preserving.

A ruler may command persons in the service of a kingdom.

That authority does not extend without limit into the independent existence of every person under the ruler's protection.

A person overcome by despair may no longer wish to continue.

The despair does not establish that another person must accompany the decision.

The Office therefore distinguishes between understanding Denethor's suffering and accepting the consequences he sought to impose upon Faramir.

The former is necessary to a fair account.

The latter is not justified by the former.

The Office enters a preliminary finding that Denethor's attempt to include Faramir in the pyre constituted a grave misuse of paternal and political authority.

XII. On the Irreversibility of the Proposed Remedy

The Office considers it necessary to examine the particular danger presented by Denethor's final conclusion.

His judgment concerned the future.

He believed Gondor would fall.

He believed resistance could no longer produce a meaningful victory.

He believed the world he had spent his life defending was passing beyond recovery.

These beliefs were not without foundation.

Nevertheless, his proposed actions would have converted an assessment of the future into an irreversible decision imposed upon another person.

The distinction is substantial.

A prediction may be mistaken.

An assessment may be revised.

New evidence may alter a conclusion.

But the deliberate ending of a life removes the possibility of revision for the person whose life is ended.

The Office therefore identifies an important asymmetry between uncertain knowledge and irreversible action.

The less reversible the proposed act, the greater the responsibility to distinguish what is known from what is feared.

The Office recognizes that not every irreversible decision can be postponed.

Medical emergencies may demand urgent intervention.

Military decisions may require immediate action.

Delay may itself cause harm.

Nevertheless, urgency does not authorize the decision-maker to treat every uncertainty as resolved.

Faramir remained alive.

That fact was distinct from Denethor's belief that his life had no future.

His condition required care.

It did not establish that care had become meaningless.

The Office therefore rejects the proposition that Denethor's inability to imagine recovery constituted sufficient grounds to prevent it.

The limits of one person's hope are not necessarily the limits of another person's future.

XIII. On Peregrin Took and the Witness Who Acted

The Office now considers the conduct of Peregrin Took.

Peregrin was a Hobbit serving Denethor during the events under review.

His standing within Gondor's hierarchy was limited.

His knowledge was incomplete.

His capacity to intervene directly was constrained.

Nevertheless, he recognized that Faramir remained in immediate danger.

The Office considers his response significant.

He did not possess authority equivalent to that of the Steward.

He could not simply issue an order superseding Denethor's command.

Nor could he reasonably expect that ordinary channels of correction would necessarily produce a timely remedy.

He therefore sought assistance.

The Office recognizes that this decision required judgment.

Peregrin had to distinguish the authority of the person directing the proceedings from the legitimacy of the act being directed.

He had to recognize danger.

He had to act under uncertainty.

And he had to seek someone capable of intervening.

A person need not possess superior authority to recognize that an order places someone in danger.

The Office does not propose that every subordinate should disregard every instruction with which the subordinate disagrees.

It does, however, reject the proposition that limited rank eliminates responsibility to respond to a grave and immediate threat to another person's life.

The Office therefore enters no adverse finding against Peregrin Took.

It recognizes that his actions contributed materially to the preservation of Faramir's life.

The Office further recommends that future custodians of extraordinary authority refrain from treating the independent judgment of Hobbits as administratively insignificant.

No amendment to Gondor's military rank structure is proposed.

XIV. On Beregond and the Lawful Order

The Office next considers Beregond of the Guard.

His conduct presents a more difficult question.

Beregond abandoned his assigned post.

He intervened at the House of the Stewards.

His actions involved the use of force.

Men died.

The Office recognizes these facts.

It does not propose to erase them merely because Beregond acted to preserve Faramir's life.

Military institutions depend upon discipline.

Orders may be necessary to coordinate defense.

Unauthorized departures may expose others to danger.

Violence against fellow servants of a lawful government presents grave concerns.

The Office therefore rejects any general proposition that a person who believes an order wrong is automatically justified in disregarding it.

Nevertheless, the circumstances confronting Beregond were exceptional.

An incapacitated person was in immediate danger of being killed.

The person directing the danger possessed the highest governing authority then present.

Ordinary channels of correction were unlikely to operate in time.

And the available evidence provided substantial grounds for concluding that Faramir's life would be lost without intervention.

The Office therefore distinguishes ordinary disobedience from resistance undertaken to prevent an immediate and grave wrong.

The existence of a lawful office does not make every command issued by its holder lawful or just.

The Office further recognizes that those who resisted Beregond occupied difficult positions of their own.

They served within an established hierarchy.

They had not necessarily participated in the judgments that produced the emergency.

Their deaths must not be dismissed as incidental merely because Beregond's purpose was legitimate.

The Office therefore declines to convert the episode into a simple account of one righteous person acting against persons presumed wicked.

The conduct requires examination.

So do the consequences.

The surrounding emergency matters.

The purpose matters.

The alternatives matter.

And the lives lost remain part of the record.

The Office recognizes that Beregond's actions were later subjected to judgment under the restored kingship.

That judgment distinguished the violation of military and sacred obligations from the purpose of preserving Faramir's life.

The Office considers this distinction particularly important.

A justified purpose does not necessarily make every means employed beyond examination.

Nor does a breach of ordinary duty establish that the purpose for which the breach occurred was illegitimate.

One may violate a rule in the course of preventing a wrong without making either the rule or the violation morally insignificant.

The Office considers this question appropriate for a separate proceeding.

XV. On the Duty to Disobey

The Office now addresses the broader question raised by Beregond's intervention.

When may an individual disregard an order issued by a person possessing legitimate authority?

The Office recognizes that institutions require coordination.

The protection of others may depend upon reliable obedience.

An instruction may be inconvenient, imperfect, or unwelcome without becoming illegitimate.

Nevertheless, the existence of an order does not eliminate the responsibility of the person asked to carry it out.

A subordinate may confront circumstances in which compliance would contribute directly to a grave wrong.

The danger may be immediate.

The evidence may be substantial.

Ordinary correction may be unavailable.

And delay may render the injury irreversible.

The Office considers such circumstances materially different from ordinary disagreement.

The duty to obey authority does not necessarily include a duty to assist authority in destroying the persons it exists to protect.

The Office acknowledges the difficulty of applying this principle.

Private judgment may be mistaken.

The consequences of disobedience may be severe.

And the person refusing an order may possess incomplete information.

The Office therefore proposes no universal rule under which personal conviction automatically supersedes institutional authority.

Its finding is narrower.

Where a person possesses substantial grounds for recognizing an imminent and grave violation of another's life, and where ordinary correction cannot operate in time, extraordinary intervention may be justified.

The Office further recognizes that such intervention does not automatically eliminate responsibility for its methods.

The purposes of rescue and accountability need not be understood as competing absolutes.

Both may require examination.

No general authorization for armed disobedience is entered.

XVI. On Gandalf and the Limits of Intervention

The Office now returns to Gandalf.

The preceding Istari Mandate established that the Wizards were sent to assist the peoples of Middle-earth without establishing themselves as sovereign replacements.

Their commission required restraint.

Nevertheless, restraint was not equivalent to indifference.

A prohibition against domination did not require passivity in the presence of an immediate threat to life.

The Office therefore considers Gandalf's intervention in the House of the Stewards relevant.

Gandalf did not arrive to assume permanent government of Gondor.

He did not claim that the Steward's despair had transferred political authority to him.

He did not seek to replace the kingdom's institutions with his own command.

He intervened to preserve the life of a person in immediate danger.

An intervention may be justified by the need to preserve another person's future without establishing a general entitlement to govern that future.

The Office further recognizes that Gandalf confronted competing obligations.

The siege continued.

The defense of the city required leadership.

The danger beyond the House of the Stewards remained grave.

His intervention therefore carried opportunity costs.

The Office does not presume those costs imaginary.

Nevertheless, the threatened death of Faramir presented a grave and immediate concern.

The Office considers the preservation of his life an appropriate objective.

It further observes that Gandalf could not compel Denethor to accept hope.

He could challenge Denethor's conclusions.

He could attempt to prevent Faramir's death.

He could seek to preserve the life still capable of being saved.

But he could not simply make Denethor choose to continue living.

The Office recognizes this limitation.

The obligation to attempt rescue does not establish unlimited power to produce recovery.

Nor does the inability to save every person render the preservation of another person's life meaningless.

The Office enters no adverse finding against Gandalf concerning his rescue of Faramir.

XVII. On the People Who Had Not Surrendered

The Office now considers the people of Gondor.

The future of the kingdom was not confined to the judgment of its Steward.

Gondor contained soldiers.

Healers.

Families.

Craftspeople.

Servants.

Messengers.

Farmers.

Children.

And persons whose names are not preserved in the surviving accounts.

They possessed interests in the continuation of the kingdom.

They possessed relationships and purposes extending beyond the private conclusions of the person governing them.

The Office therefore rejects the assumption that Denethor's despair constituted the collective resignation of all persons under his authority.

A ruler may conclude that the available defenses are inadequate.

The ruler may believe defeat likely.

The ruler may become convinced that the kingdom cannot survive.

Nevertheless, those conclusions do not establish that every person governed has surrendered the desire to continue living.

A people does not cease to possess a future merely because its ruler has ceased to believe in one.

Beyond Denethor's immediate understanding, persons continued to act.

The defenders of Gondor remained engaged.

Allies were moving.

Decisions were being made.

The consequences of those decisions had not yet become fully visible.

The future was not simply awaiting confirmation of the Steward's assessment.

It was being shaped by persons whose actions the assessment could not encompass.

The Office does not conclude that Gondor was guaranteed to survive.

It concludes that survival had not yet been rendered impossible.

The distinction is sufficient.

XVIII. On the Stewardship That Continued

The Office now considers Faramir's survival.

Faramir lived.

He recovered.

His life continued beyond the crisis in which his father had believed no future remained.

The Office recognizes that his survival did not erase his suffering.

He had been injured.

He had lost his father and brother.

He had experienced war and profound uncertainty.

Recovery did not restore every former condition of his life.

Nevertheless, the continuation of his life demonstrates the significance of preserving possibilities that have not yet been foreclosed.

Denethor believed the future was lost.

Faramir lived into it.

Gondor continued.

Its political order changed.

Aragorn became king.

Faramir remained a figure of considerable importance within the restored kingdom.

The Office does not propose that these developments retroactively eliminate the seriousness of the earlier danger.

Nor does it suggest that the eventual outcome proves every earlier decision mistaken.

It does, however, recognize that the future contained possibilities unavailable to Denethor's final judgment.

The survival of a person does not prove that the danger was never real.

It proves that the danger had not yet become the person's final condition.

The Office further observes that Faramir's life was not worth preserving solely because Gondor required a successor.

His future was not merely a matter of political continuity.

He was not simply an office waiting to be filled.

Nor was his recovery justified only by the service he might subsequently perform.

He was alive.

He possessed a life of his own.

That fact was sufficient to make its preservation a matter of concern.

The Office considers this distinction fundamental.

XIX. Preliminary Findings

Following examination of the surviving historical and narrative accounts, the Office enters the following provisional findings.

First. Denethor II possessed legitimate authority as Ruling Steward of Gondor and exercised that authority under circumstances of extraordinary military danger.

Second. The legitimacy of his office did not establish that Gondor's future belonged to him in an unrestricted personal capacity.

Third. The severity of the threat posed by Mordor was genuine and must not be dismissed merely because Gondor ultimately survived.

Fourth. Denethor possessed substantial intelligence, strength of will, and administrative experience. His final errors cannot adequately be explained through the assumption that he was simply incapable.

Fifth. His use of the Anor-stone was not inherently unauthorized, but legitimate access did not eliminate the risks of adversarial influence and incomplete interpretation.

Sixth. The perception of genuine enemy strength did not establish the inevitability of defeat.

Seventh. The appearance of the ships bearing black sails illustrates the danger of interpreting accurate observations without knowledge of material changes in their circumstances.

Eighth. Prolonged responsibility, grief, and exposure to threatening information may affect judgment without eliminating the responsibilities associated with authority.

Ninth. Denethor's grief over Boromir and the earlier loss of Finduilas were significant circumstances requiring recognition, but grief did not justify every subsequent decision.

Tenth. Faramir possessed interests, judgment, and a future independent of his father's political office and personal despair.

Eleventh. The legitimacy of a dangerous military assignment must be evaluated according to the information, alternatives, and purposes relevant at the time.

Twelfth. Whatever the justification for Faramir's military duties, his subsequent condition as a gravely injured person required protection and care.

Thirteenth. The private experience of despair does not establish authority to impose its irreversible consequences upon another person.

Fourteenth. Faramir's inability to resist the preparations in the House of the Stewards did not constitute consent to his death.

Fifteenth. Denethor's attempt to include Faramir in his final act constituted a grave misuse of paternal and political authority.

Sixteenth. Peregrin Took's limited institutional standing did not eliminate the legitimacy of his efforts to obtain assistance for a person in immediate danger.

Seventeenth. Beregond's conduct raises exceptional questions concerning the duty to obey orders, the protection of life, and accountability for harms arising from intervention.

Eighteenth. The legitimacy of an office does not render every instruction issued by its holder legitimate.

Nineteenth. Gandalf's intervention to preserve Faramir's life was distinguishable from an attempt to assume permanent political authority over Gondor.

Twentieth. The obligation to attempt rescue does not establish unlimited power to compel another person to accept assistance or continue living.

Twenty-first. A ruler's conviction that a kingdom has no future does not establish that its people have collectively surrendered their right to pursue one.

Twenty-second. Faramir's survival and Gondor's continuation demonstrate that Denethor's final assessment did not encompass every possibility that remained.

Twenty-third. The legitimacy of stewardship depends not merely upon the ability to recognize danger, but upon the preservation, where

reasonably possible, of the lives and choices of those entrusted to the steward's care.

These findings are preliminary.

They do not constitute a clinical diagnosis of Denethor.

They do not establish that Gondor's survival was guaranteed.

Nor do they conclude that every person who retained hope possessed a more complete understanding of the military situation.

The Office recognizes that hope may be mistaken.

It likewise recognizes that despair may be mistaken.

Neither condition eliminates the need for judgment.

The inquiry therefore preserves the distinction between the reality of danger and the finality of the conclusions drawn from it.

XX. On the Future That Had Not Yet Been Given Away

The Office considers it appropriate to conclude by returning to the nature of stewardship.

A steward receives responsibility.

Not possession.

Not unlimited authority.

Not the power to determine every consequence of the future.

Responsibility.

To preserve what can be preserved.

To recognize danger.

To make difficult decisions.

To seek assistance when assistance is needed.

To accept that judgment may be imperfect.

And to remember that the persons whose lives are affected by the exercise of authority remain persons whose lives are their own.

Denethor carried such responsibility.

For many years, he defended Gondor.

He knew its history.

He understood its enemies.

He possessed knowledge others did not.

He had reason to fear the power approaching its walls.

And he had experienced losses that no political authority could reverse.

The Office does not regard these circumstances lightly.

A kingdom was threatened.

A son had died.

Another lay gravely ill.

The future appeared terrible.

And the person entrusted with defending that future could no longer perceive a path through which it might be preserved.

The Office recognizes the tragedy.

It does not require Denethor to have felt differently.

It does not require him to have been cheerful.

It does not require him to have regarded the danger as less serious than the evidence suggested.

Nor does it insist that hope can be summoned whenever circumstances become unbearable.

The Office recognizes that despair may be real.

It may be profound.

It may resist consolation.

It may arise from losses that cannot be repaired.

And it may occur in persons whose intelligence, courage, and previous service are beyond reasonable dispute.

But despair remains an experience of the person who suffers it.

It does not become a universal truth merely because the sufferer possesses authority.

A ruler's certainty is not the future itself.

This is the distinction the Office considers essential.

Denethor believed that Gondor would fall.

He believed that the forces of Mordor could not be overcome.

He believed that assistance would be insufficient.

He believed that the future he had spent his life defending was passing beyond recovery.

These beliefs were not without foundation.

But their foundation did not establish their finality.

Beyond the Steward's knowledge, other persons continued to act.

Some were fighting.

Some were traveling.

Some were bringing assistance.

Some were preserving the wounded.

Some were making decisions whose consequences had not yet become visible.

And some were attempting to accomplish things that the Steward had ceased to believe possible.

The world had not stopped merely because he could no longer imagine its continuation.

The Office therefore distinguishes between the future as anticipated and the future as lived.

A ruler may anticipate defeat.

The defeat has not necessarily occurred.

A father may anticipate the death of a child.

The child may remain alive.

A person may anticipate the end of everything familiar.

The world may nevertheless continue in forms the person has not imagined.

These possibilities do not establish that hope will always prove correct.

They establish that the future is not simply a conclusion drawn from present suffering.

The future is not made final by the certainty with which one person predicts it.

Denethor's tragedy was not that he recognized danger.

The danger was real.

Nor was it simply that he experienced despair.

His suffering was real.

The tragedy arose when his despair became inseparable from the authority he exercised over the lives of others.

He came to regard the future as closed.

And in the House of the Stewards, he attempted to close it for his son.

The Office considers that distinction decisive.

Faramir was alive.

He was injured.

He was vulnerable.

He could not adequately defend himself.

But he remained a person whose life had not reached its conclusion.

His father could fear his death.

His father could mourn what he believed was approaching.

His father could experience despair beyond the reach of consolation.

None of these circumstances established that Faramir's future had become his father's to terminate.

Love does not confer ownership.

Grief does not confer ownership.

And authority exercised in the name of protection does not confer ownership of the person protected.

These principles do not deny the importance of family.

They recognize the limits of the authority that family relationships may confer.

Nor do they deny the importance of government.

They recognize that government exists for purposes extending beyond the preservation of the person who governs.

A steward may be entrusted with a kingdom.

He may not reasonably regard the kingdom's existence as inseparable from his own.

A father may be entrusted with the protection of a child.

He may not regard the child's future as extinguished merely because his own hope has failed.

The Office therefore returns to the meaning of stewardship.

To be entrusted with something is to accept responsibility for its care.

It does not necessarily confer the right to determine that what has been entrusted must perish when the custodian can no longer preserve it according to the custodian's preferred understanding.

There may come a time when an institution must pass into other hands.

A ruler may become unable to continue.

A commander may be relieved.

A guardian may require assistance.

A parent may become incapable of providing the care a child needs.

These circumstances may be painful.

They may involve loss of identity.

They may produce fear.

Nevertheless, the continuation of others must not be treated as an injury merely because that continuation no longer depends upon the original custodian.

The success of stewardship may eventually require the steward to relinquish the power to decide.

The Office recognizes that Denethor's circumstances were more complicated than an ordinary transfer of authority.

Gondor was under siege.

The enemy threatened destruction.

The apparent alternatives were limited.

And the possible arrival of a returning king raised questions concerning the future of the office Denethor had inherited.

These matters cannot be reduced to a routine administrative transition.

Nevertheless, the underlying distinction remains.

The kingdom was not merely the Steward's office.

It was the people.

The homes.

The histories.

The fields.

The children.

The wounded.

The persons who would survive if survival remained possible.

The future of Gondor belonged, in a moral sense, to more than the individual entrusted with governing it.

And the existence of those persons was not rendered meaningless by the possibility that the familiar order might end.

The Office therefore rejects the assumption that a future different from the one a ruler hoped to preserve is necessarily no future at all.

A kingdom may change.

Its offices may change.

Its rulers may change.

Its institutions may be reformed.

Such changes may involve loss.

They do not necessarily constitute annihilation.

The Office considers this distinction especially important where a person has spent many years bearing responsibility for an institution.

Responsibility may become identity.

Identity may become attachment.

Attachment may become fear of relinquishment.

And fear of relinquishment may eventually make the institution's continuation under another's care appear indistinguishable from its destruction.

The Office recognizes this danger.

It does not consider Denethor's political concerns identical to the military threat posed by Sauron.

Nor does it suggest that his decisions can be understood through either concern in isolation.

His judgment was shaped by more than one fear.

And those fears became increasingly difficult to separate.

Yet the future remained unfinished.

Faramir remained alive.

Gondor continued to resist.

Beyond the Steward's immediate understanding, the circumstances of the war were changing.

The Office does not suggest that Denethor could have known everything that would follow.

He could not.

That is precisely the point.

The inability to know the future is not authority to prevent it.

The Office recognizes that this principle places an extraordinary burden upon those exercising power.

They must act without certainty.

They must make decisions while afraid.

They must accept that their judgments may be mistaken.

They must sometimes preserve possibilities whose likelihood they cannot establish.

And they must recognize that their own exhaustion does not necessarily establish the exhaustion of every person under their care.

This is not a demand for infallibility.

It is a demand for restraint in the face of fallibility.

The Office does not require the steward to know that Gondor will survive.

It requires recognition that the steward does not know that Gondor cannot survive.

It does not require the father to know that Faramir will recover.

It requires recognition that the father's inability to imagine recovery does not establish that recovery is impossible.

And it does not require the grieving person to feel hope.

It requires that the person's grief not be converted into an irreversible command governing another's life.

The distinction is narrow.

It is also profound.

For the authority to protect another person may become most dangerous at the moment the protector ceases to believe that protection remains possible.

The temptation may then arise to declare the matter concluded.

To spare further suffering.

To prevent an anticipated humiliation.

To avoid witnessing the destruction of what was loved.

These desires may arise from genuine anguish.

Their sincerity does not establish that they are justified.

An act undertaken to prevent an imagined future may destroy a future that had not yet been lost.

The Office considers the events in the House of the Stewards an illustration of this danger.

Faramir's life was nearly extinguished not because his death had become inevitable, but because another person had become convinced that no meaningful alternative remained.

The distinction deserves preservation.

And it is here that the actions of those possessing less authority become significant.

Peregrin Took recognized the danger.

He sought help.

Beregond acted to prevent the destruction of a life.

Gandalf intervened.

Their judgments were not identical.

Their capacities differed.

Their actions carried different consequences.

But none accepted that the Steward's despair had finally determined Faramir's fate.

The Office does not propose that these acts were without difficulty.

Beregond's intervention involved the breach of military discipline and the loss of life.

Gandalf's decision required attention to be diverted from the defense of the city.

Peregrin acted under conditions of limited knowledge.

The circumstances were not simple.

Nevertheless, the result was the preservation of a person whose life had not ended.

Faramir survived.

He recovered.

He continued.

And the kingdom that his father had believed lost continued as well.

The Office recognizes that these outcomes do not erase Denethor's grief.

They do not establish that the military danger was exaggerated.

They do not make his final hours less tragic.

Nor do they authorize the Office to treat his earlier service as worthless.

Denethor defended Gondor for many years.

His final error does not erase every good he accomplished.

But neither does that service excuse the danger he imposed upon his son.

The Office considers both truths necessary.

For a person may have served faithfully and still fail terribly.

A person may have acted courageously and later become overwhelmed.

A person may deserve compassion and nevertheless require opposition.

And a person may possess legitimate authority while issuing a command that must not be obeyed.

These circumstances do not make ethical judgment impossible.

They make careful judgment necessary.

The Office therefore returns to the distinction established in the preceding Palantír Question.

To see is not necessarily to know.

To know is not necessarily to understand.

And to understand does not necessarily confer the right to command.

Denethor saw danger.

He understood much about it.

Yet his knowledge did not encompass every possibility that remained.

His final judgment therefore exceeded what his information could establish.

The Office does not condemn him for failing to predict victory.

It does not condemn him for being afraid.

It does not condemn him for grieving.

It does not condemn him for reaching the limits of his endurance.

It does, however, reject the proposition that the limits of his endurance authorized him to determine the limits of another person's life.

A person may be unable to continue.

That does not establish that everyone entrusted to that person's care must also cease.

This is the central finding of the present inquiry.

It is a finding concerning authority.

It is also a finding concerning compassion.

For compassion toward the grieving does not require accepting every conclusion grief produces.

And compassion toward a person who wishes to die does not require allowing that person's despair to govern the lives of others.

The Office recognizes the profound difficulty of such circumstances.

It recognizes the limitations of rescue.

It recognizes that not every person can be persuaded to accept assistance.

It recognizes that some losses cannot be prevented.

But where a life remains, and where protection remains possible, the Office considers that possibility worthy of preservation.

Not because survival is guaranteed to be easy.

Not because the future is certain to become good.

Not because every injury can be repaired.

But because the person who remains alive has not yet exhausted the possibilities of that life.

The Office therefore enters its concluding determination:

The burden of stewardship is not the burden of knowing that those entrusted to one's care will survive.

It is the responsibility to preserve their opportunity to survive where preservation remains possible.

Denethor did not know that Gondor would fall.

He feared that it would.

He did not know that Faramir would die.

He feared that he would.

He did not know that no help remained.

He could no longer perceive help sufficient to alter the outcome.

These distinctions matter.

For the future was not finished.

And those who remained had not surrendered their right to enter it.

The Office considers that right worthy of protection.

Even when the protector is afraid.

Even when the evidence is incomplete.

Even when the danger is great.

And even when the person entrusted with responsibility has lost the strength to believe that responsibility can still be fulfilled.

The future does not belong exclusively to the person who fears it most.

The Office considers this distinction sufficient grounds for its findings.

XXI. Notice of Continuing Proceedings

The Office directs that the present findings be entered into the Maiar Accountability Record.

The inquiry into Denethor II is concluded for purposes of preliminary historical and ethical review.

Questions concerning the precise effects of the Anor-stone, the allocation of military responsibility, and the circumstances surrounding Denethor's final decisions remain subject to further examination.

The Office recognizes that the surviving narrative does not provide a complete account of every private thought or military consideration relevant to the events.

No unsupported psychological or historical determination is entered.

The findings concerning Faramir's right to protection remain in effect.

The Office further directs that the conduct of Peregrin Took, Beregond, and Gandalf be cross-referenced with the present proceeding.

The following related inquiry is provisionally scheduled:

THE BEREGOND QUESTION

On Disobedience, Urgent Rescue, and the Difference Between the Lawful Order and the Just Act

Particular attention will be directed toward the obligations of persons serving under legitimate authority, the circumstances under which disobedience may be justified, and the responsibility to account for harms arising from interventions undertaken to prevent greater harm.

The Office recognizes that the subject presents substantial difficulties.

No general exemption from lawful discipline is proposed.

The inquiry continues.

SUPPLEMENTAL ADMINISTRATIVE NOTICE

Concerning the Preservation of Persons During Institutional Emergency

The Office has reviewed the circumstances surrounding Faramir's condition in the House of the Stewards.

The review identifies several concerns.

Faramir was gravely injured.

His capacity to communicate his wishes was compromised.

The person exercising immediate authority over his circumstances had reached conclusions concerning his prospects that were not supported by a definitive determination of death.

The Office therefore recommends that future procedures governing the treatment of incapacitated persons distinguish clearly between the authority to arrange care and the authority to authorize irreversible measures.

The Records Division has requested clarification concerning whether Faramir's inclusion in funeral preparations constituted a clerical error, an improper administrative designation, or an intentional act undertaken under compromised judgment.

The Director has advised that the historical record supports the latter characterization.

The Division acknowledges the finding.

It further requests confirmation that Faramir remained alive at the time of the preparations.

The Director has confirmed this fact.

The Division has therefore determined that no death certificate should have been issued.

It has also directed that no future funeral arrangements be initiated solely upon the basis of anticipated death where the person concerned remains alive.

The Office recognizes that wartime conditions may complicate ordinary recordkeeping.

It does not consider an active siege sufficient grounds for classifying a living person as deceased.

The matter is entered as a procedural safeguard.

INTERNAL INFORMATION SECURITY MEMORANDUM

TO: Director, Office of Improbable Jurisdiction
FROM: Department of Records, Communications, and Information Security
RE: Adversarial Information Exposure — The Anor-Stone

The Department has completed a preliminary review of Denethor's use of the palantír of Minas Tirith.

The Department recognizes that Denethor possessed legitimate grounds for access.

It further recognizes that the stone was capable of revealing genuine information.

Nevertheless, the Department identifies substantial concerns regarding the reliability of interpretations formed through communication involving a hostile participant.

The Department does not conclude that every observation was false.

Indeed, the available record indicates that important observations were genuine.

The Department considers this circumstance central to the incident.

An adversary capable of influencing the selection or interpretation of accurate information may compromise the recipient's judgment without requiring the fabrication of evidence.

The Department therefore recommends that future custodians distinguish the authenticity of an observation from the completeness of the resulting assessment.

The Director has requested clarification concerning whether Denethor's access should have been revoked.

The Department has advised that the question cannot be resolved solely through the fact that contact was dangerous.

The legitimate need for strategic information must also be considered.

The Director has asked whether an authorized user may nevertheless require limitations upon continued access.

The Department considers this possibility substantial.

It further recommends that future custodial arrangements provide for independent verification, consultation, and relief from continuous exposure where circumstances permit.

The Director has asked whether the Anor-stone possessed a function through which adverse communications could be blocked.

The Department has not identified such a function.

The Director has asked whether the stone could have displayed an appropriate warning before presenting information originating from an adversarial source.

The Department considers the suggestion administratively reasonable.

It has not identified evidence that the stone supported such a feature.

The Director has requested that the matter be referred to the original manufacturer.

The Department has advised that such a referral may present substantial practical difficulties.

No ordinary customer-support arrangement has been established for the palantíri.

The Department considers this limitation unsurprising.

INTERNAL PERSONNEL AND CONTINUITY MEMORANDUM

TO: Director, Office of Improbable Jurisdiction
FROM: Department of Institutional Continuity and Delegated Authority
RE: Temporary Incapacity, Succession, and Preservation of the Stewardship of Gondor

The Department has reviewed the circumstances surrounding the incapacity and subsequent death of Denethor II.

The Department recognizes that Gondor maintained established institutions of authority.

It further recognizes that the relevant events occurred during a military emergency of exceptional severity.

Nevertheless, the Department identifies the need to distinguish among three separate matters:

The personal condition of the officeholder.

The continued legitimacy of the office.

And the interests of persons affected by the officeholder's decisions.

The Department observes that the incapacity or death of a leader does not necessarily establish the termination of the institution.

Nor does an officeholder's belief that the institution cannot survive constitute a formal dissolution of the institution.

The Director has requested clarification concerning whether Denethor's conclusions regarding Gondor's future should have been entered as an official determination of institutional failure.

The Department advises against such classification.

The available record does not establish that the kingdom had ceased to exist.

Nor does it establish that its defenders had ceased resistance.

Nor does it establish that succession or political continuity had become impossible.

The Department therefore recommends that the Steward's personal assessment be maintained as a historical judgment rather than entered as a completed institutional termination.

The Director has approved this recommendation.

The Department has further requested clarification concerning Faramir's status during his incapacity.

The Director has advised that Faramir remained alive and continued to possess interests independent of the future disposition of the Stewardship.

The Department concurs.

The inability of an heir to exercise authority during medical incapacity does not render the heir available for disposal as an institutional asset.

The Department considers this distinction fundamental.

No further clarification is required.

INTERNAL FINANCE MEMORANDUM

TO: Director, Office of Improbable Jurisdiction
FROM: Office of Finance and Appropriations
RE: Funeral Expenditures, Emergency Authority, and the Classification of Anticipated Losses

The Finance Division acknowledges receipt of the preliminary investigation concerning Denethor II.

The Division recognizes that the events occurred under conditions of extraordinary military and institutional emergency.

It further recognizes that the loss of life during the Siege of Gondor was substantial.

Nevertheless, the Division has identified concerns regarding the classification of expenditures associated with the preparations in the House of the Stewards.

The available record indicates that funeral arrangements were initiated for more than one person.

The Division has requested confirmation of the persons for whom the arrangements were intended.

The Director has identified Denethor and Faramir.

The Division acknowledges the response.

It further understands that Faramir was alive at the time.

The Division therefore requests clarification concerning the justification for classifying the proposed expenditure as a funeral cost.

The Director has advised that Denethor believed Faramir would not survive.

The Division recognizes the gravity of that belief.

It nevertheless observes that an anticipated death does not constitute a completed death for purposes of ordinary accounting classification.

The Division has therefore declined to approve the expenditure as submitted.

The Director has requested that the classification be reconsidered in light of the extraordinary circumstances.

The Division has reviewed the request.

It recognizes that wartime accounting procedures may require flexibility.

It further recognizes that funeral arrangements may reasonably be prepared in anticipation of an expected death.

Nevertheless, the Division distinguishes advance planning from the irreversible treatment of a living person as deceased.

The Division does not authorize the recognition of a living person as a completed loss merely because the responsible authority has ceased to expect recovery.

The Director has approved this finding.

The Division has further requested clarification concerning whether Faramir's subsequent recovery requires amendment of the original expenditure record.

The Director has advised that the proposed expenditure was not completed in the form originally intended.

The Division has therefore directed that the record reflect the interruption of the preparations and the preservation of Faramir's life.

No reimbursement is authorized for expenses directly associated with the attempted destruction of that life.

The Division considers the distinction sufficient.

FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM

Concerning the Classification of the Future

The Records Division has received a request to determine the appropriate classification of Gondor's status at the time of Denethor's death.

The available record indicates that the city remained under attack.

Its military position was grave.

Its leadership had experienced substantial disruption.

The possibility of defeat remained real.

Nevertheless, the kingdom had not ceased to exist.

Its defenders continued to act.

Assistance remained possible.

And its subsequent history established that the political order would continue in altered form.

The Division has therefore declined to enter the designation **TERMINATED**.

The Director has asked whether the classification **SURVIVAL ASSURED** would be appropriate.

The Division has declined.

The available evidence at the time did not establish such certainty.

The Director has requested a final designation.

The Division has entered:

FUTURE UNDETERMINED — CONTINUATION POSSIBLE.

The Director has approved the designation.

The Division has further requested clarification concerning the appropriate classification of Faramir.

The Director has advised:

LIVING — RECOVERY PENDING.

The Division acknowledges the determination.

No further amendment is required.

END OF CONTINUING INVESTIGATION VI

Issued under the authority claimed by the Office of Improbable Jurisdiction, the existence and limits of which remain subject to examination.

The Office recognizes Denethor II as a capable steward who exercised legitimate authority under extraordinary conditions of danger and grief.

The Office further recognizes that those circumstances did not justify the attempted extinguishing of Faramir's life.

The reality of despair is acknowledged.

Its conversion into compulsory final judgment is rejected.

The inquiry continues.

Literary and Interpretive Note

This fictional investigation draws principally upon J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, particularly the events concerning Denethor II, the Siege of Gondor, the palantír of Minas Tirith, the condition of Faramir, and the intervention of Peregrin Took, Beregond, and Gandalf.

It also draws upon the historical material concerning the Stewards of Gondor preserved in the appendices and related writings, including the accounts of Denethor's family and the circumstances of his rule.

The inquiry distinguishes between Tolkien's narrative history and the Office's speculative administrative and ethical standards.

Its discussions of emergency authority, institutional continuity, informed consent, duty of care, information security, and the responsibilities of government are fictional interpretive devices rather than legal standards established within Tolkien's world.

The document does not propose a clinical diagnosis of Denethor.

Nor does it reduce his conduct to a single psychological explanation.

It recognizes his intelligence, legitimate authority, military responsibilities, bereavement, political convictions, and exposure to information influenced by Sauron.

It also distinguishes these circumstances from the separate question of whether his final decisions were justified.

The inquiry does not suggest that Denethor was required to predict Gondor's survival.

It instead considers the difference between acting responsibly under uncertainty and treating an uncertain outcome as already settled.

The conduct of Peregrin Took, Beregond, and Gandalf is examined with attention to the circumstances of their intervention and without suggesting that all forms of disobedience or intervention are automatically justified.

The Office's concern is not merely that Denethor lost hope.

It is that he attempted to make his loss of hope authoritative over the life of another person.

The central question therefore concerns the limits of stewardship:

Whether a person entrusted with the protection of others may declare their future ended merely because the person can no longer imagine how it might continue.

The Office finds that he may not.