OFFICE OF IMPROBABLE JURISDICTION

Department of Delegated Powers, Incarnate Emissary Welfare, Cosmic Administration, and the Protection of Free Peoples

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THE NINE WHO DID NOT RETURN

On the Promise of Life, the Extinguishing of Will, and the Responsibilities Owed to Those Made Instruments of Dominion

A Continuing Inquiry into the Distribution of the Nine Rings, the Progressive Subordination of Their Bearers, the Distinction Between Responsibility and Enslavement, and the Moral Consequences of a System That Preserved Its Subjects While Destroying Their Freedom

Office of Improbable Jurisdiction
November 14, 2026

NOTICE OF CONTINUING INVESTIGATION

The Office of Improbable Jurisdiction hereby continues its inquiry into the creation, distribution, and consequences of the Rings of Power, with particular attention to the Nine Rings that came into the possession of mortal Men.

The preceding Ring Inquiry established that the One Ring was created for the purpose of domination.

It further established that the promise of extraordinary power does not constitute informed consent to undisclosed subordination.

The present proceeding concerns nine individuals whose existence was profoundly altered through their possession of Rings of Power.

They became known as the Nazgûl.

The Ringwraiths.

The Nine.

Their appearance inspired terror.

Their service advanced the purposes of Sauron.

Their actions contributed to war, suffering, and the destruction of communities.

The Office does not dispute these matters.

It does, however, observe that the history of their conduct cannot be adequately understood without considering the circumstances under which they became instruments of another being's will.

The Nine were not created as Ringwraiths.

They had lives before the Rings.

They possessed histories.

They belonged to peoples.

They exercised judgment.

They experienced desires, ambitions, fears, and attachments whose particular forms are now largely unknown.

They were mortal.

And the Rings offered them something beyond ordinary mortality.

Power.

Influence.

The apparent possibility of escaping limitations that no mortal ruler, however mighty, could otherwise overcome.

Yet the existence they received was not equivalent to the life they had possessed.

Their years continued.

Their independence diminished.

Their power increased.

Their freedom did not.

And the persons who had once accepted the Rings became increasingly bound to the purposes of the being who had distributed them.

The Office therefore distinguishes between the continuation of existence and the preservation of the conditions under which existence remains one's own.

This distinction is central.

A life prolonged through the destruction of its bearer's freedom has not necessarily been preserved for the bearer's benefit.

The Office further recognizes that those subjected to domination may subsequently become agents through whom domination is inflicted upon others.

This circumstance presents a difficult ethical problem.

A person may be harmed by a system.

That person may also cause harm within the system.

The harms may be related.

They are not interchangeable.

Nor does acknowledging one erase the other.

The Office therefore declines to classify the Nine exclusively as victims or perpetrators without examining the circumstances of their transformation and service.

It also declines to invent individual histories that the surviving accounts do not establish.

The absence of a complete record is unfortunate.

It does not authorize speculation to be entered as fact.

The Office considers this distinction particularly important where the subjects can no longer speak for themselves.

The inquiry proceeds.

I. On the Men Who Received the Rings

The Office first considers the Nine before their transformation.

The surviving histories describe mortal Men who received Rings of Power and subsequently attained extraordinary prominence.

They became mighty figures in their time, associated with kingship, sorcery, and military power.

The record does not establish that all nine occupied identical positions before receiving their Rings.

Nor does it provide a complete account of their original identities.

Certain information survives concerning individual members.

The chief of the Nazgûl became known as the Witch-king.

Another, identified in later writings as Khamûl, was associated with the East.

Yet these fragments do not constitute complete biographies.

Most of the individuals remain unnamed in the surviving narratives.

Their families are unknown.

Their particular communities are incompletely described.

The circumstances under which they accepted their Rings cannot be reconstructed in sufficient detail to establish a uniform account of their motives.

The Office considers this limitation significant.

The Nine are frequently described collectively because their later service under Sauron made them recognizable as a group.

But collective identity after subordination does not establish identical identity before it.

They were not necessarily nine men with the same ambitions.

They did not necessarily understand the Rings in the same manner.

They may not have possessed equal knowledge concerning their origin, operation, or consequences.

Nor does their eventual similarity as Ringwraiths establish that they experienced the process of transformation identically.

A common condition of captivity does not prove that those held captive entered it through identical choices.

The Office therefore declines to assign motives to individuals whose histories remain unknown.

It will not assume that all nine were innocent.

It will not assume that all nine knowingly sought domination.

It will not assume that each understood the arrangement in the same way.

The surviving evidence does not permit such conclusions.

The Office further observes that the disappearance of their earlier identities from the surviving record is relevant to the nature of the domination under examination.

The men became known principally through what Sauron made of them.

Their earlier lives became secondary to their functions.

The Office considers this transformation worthy of particular attention.

II. On the Promise of Life

The Office now considers the attraction of prolonged existence.

Mortality imposes limitations upon human undertakings.

A person may begin work that cannot be completed within a single lifetime.

A ruler may fear the dissolution of a kingdom.

A craftsperson may wish to preserve achievements that time will eventually diminish.

A parent may fear separation from those who are loved.

A person may simply wish to continue living.

The Office does not regard these desires as inherently corrupt.

Nor does it presume that the fear of death is evidence of moral deficiency.

Mortality is not an administrative inconvenience that can be dismissed through the observation that all persons eventually experience it.

The prospect of extended life may therefore possess genuine appeal.

Yet the Office distinguishes between the continuation of existence and the conditions under which that continuation may properly be understood as a benefit.

More time may permit further experience.

It may permit learning.

It may permit the repair of relationships.

It may offer opportunities unavailable within a shorter life.

But additional time does not necessarily improve a life if the person living it is progressively deprived of the capacity to determine what that life will contain.

The Nine received a form of prolonged existence.

Their eventual condition cannot reasonably be regarded as an ordinary extension of mortal life.

They faded from the visible world.

Their independence diminished.

Their relationship to Sauron's power became increasingly absolute.

The Office therefore asks:

What benefit remains in a promise of life when the recipient is no longer free to live it?

The question is not merely rhetorical.

A benefit cannot be evaluated solely through its duration.

An institution might accurately report that an individual's existence had been extended while concealing that the extension had been accompanied by extraordinary suffering.

The report might be technically correct.

It would remain gravely incomplete.

The Office therefore enters the following preliminary principle:

The extension of a person's existence does not establish the preservation of that person's welfare.

Nor does the provision of additional years justify the extinguishing of the freedom through which those years might have possessed meaning.

III. On the Gift That Concealed Its Price

The Office returns to the circumstances in which the Nine Rings were distributed.

The preceding Ring Inquiry examined Sauron's use of gifts and concealed governing authority.

Those findings are incorporated into the present proceeding.

The Office recognizes that a recipient may knowingly accept a dangerous undertaking.

A person may desire power.

A person may accept obligations.

A person may enter an arrangement involving substantial risk.

The existence of such decisions does not automatically establish coercion.

Nevertheless, informed acceptance requires meaningful knowledge of the conditions being accepted.

A recipient who is promised extraordinary power may understand that power carries danger.

That understanding does not necessarily establish awareness that the instrument was designed to subordinate the recipient's will.

Nor does acceptance of a benefit establish consent to an undisclosed transformation of identity and independence.

The Office therefore distinguishes between the desire to acquire power and the desire to surrender one's capacity to choose.

These are not equivalent.

A person might wish to become a powerful ruler.

The wish does not establish a corresponding desire to become the permanent servant of another ruler.

A person might wish to escape death.

The wish does not establish consent to existence in a condition of perpetual domination.

A person might accept an extraordinary gift.

The acceptance does not establish agreement to every concealed consequence engineered into the gift.

The desire for power is not consent to enslavement.

The Office further recognizes that the recipients may have exercised poor judgment.

Some may have committed serious wrongdoing before their transformation.

Some may have knowingly pursued ambitions that endangered others.

The Office does not presume otherwise.

But an individual's wrongdoing does not establish that every subsequent injury inflicted upon that individual was deserved.

Nor does moral imperfection render informed consent unnecessary.

A person does not forfeit every claim to freedom merely by demonstrating that the person might misuse freedom.

The Office considers this principle especially relevant to the Nine.

Their original ambitions, whatever those ambitions may have been, do not automatically justify the condition into which they were transformed.

IV. On the Gradual Extinguishing of Will

The Office next examines the progressive character of the Nine's transformation.

Their subordination did not occur as an ordinary transfer of political allegiance.

The Rings altered their condition over time.

Their existence was prolonged.

Their relationship to the visible world changed.

Their independence diminished.

Eventually, they became Ringwraiths, bound to the dominion of Sauron.

The Office considers the progressive character of this process significant.

A person may enter an arrangement while possessing the ability to reconsider participation.

The arrangement may subsequently create dependence.

Dependence may restrict alternatives.

The ability to refuse may diminish.

And continued participation may eventually cease to resemble the exercise of judgment through which the arrangement originally began.

The Office therefore rejects the proposition that an initial decision necessarily establishes permanent consent to every later condition.

Consent cannot be treated as indefinitely renewable merely because the person who once gave it has become incapable of withdrawing it.

The Office recognizes that this formulation is an interpretive ethical standard rather than a documented provision governing the Rings.

Nevertheless, the distinction illuminates the difficulty.

At what point did a bearer cease to possess meaningful independence?

Could the process have been recognized?

Could the person have escaped?

Could assistance have been provided?

Could the Ring have been relinquished?

The surviving accounts do not permit complete answers.

The Office therefore declines to assign a precise moment at which each of the Nine lost the capacity to act freely.

It likewise declines to treat uncertainty concerning that moment as evidence that no such loss occurred.

The final condition of the Nazgûl establishes subordination far beyond ordinary political loyalty.

The precise history of that transformation remains incomplete.

The Office considers both observations necessary.

V. On the Person Who Became an Instrument

The Office now considers the language through which the Nazgûl are commonly described.

They are servants.

They are messengers.

They are captains.

They are instruments of Sauron's will.

These descriptions are relevant to their later activities.

They do not necessarily provide complete accounts of the beings performing those activities.

An instrument is ordinarily valued according to the purposes it serves.

A sword may be judged by its effectiveness.

A machine may be judged by its operation.

A communications device may be judged by its capacity to transmit information.

Persons, however, cannot adequately be evaluated solely through the purposes another person has assigned to them.

The Office therefore distinguishes between being made useful to another and being reduced to that usefulness.

The distinction is central to the present proceeding.

Sauron's domination transformed the Nine into instruments through which his power could operate.

Their abilities to inspire fear, gather information, command forces, and pursue the Ring served his purposes.

But the fact that they served those purposes does not establish that service exhausted the ethical significance of their existence.

A person made into an instrument does not become an object merely because the instrument functions.

The Office recognizes the difficulty of applying ordinary concepts of personhood to beings whose condition had been altered by extraordinary supernatural power.

It does not presume that the Nazgûl retained every faculty or relationship associated with their earlier mortal lives.

Nor does it suggest that their later condition can be understood simply by treating them as ordinary Men possessing unusual abilities.

Their transformation was substantial.

Nevertheless, the Office rejects the proposition that substantial alteration automatically eliminates every question concerning the harm inflicted through that alteration.

Indeed, the more profound the destruction of independent identity, the more important it becomes to examine who caused it and for what purpose.

The Office therefore enters no finding that the Nine ceased to matter as subjects of ethical concern when they became useful to Sauron.

VI. On Responsibility Before and After Subordination

The Office now addresses a particularly difficult question.

To what extent may the Nine be held responsible for acts undertaken under conditions of progressively diminished independence?

The Office recognizes that responsibility depends upon circumstances.

Knowledge matters.

Intention matters.

The availability of alternatives matters.

The capacity to refuse matters.

The degree of coercion matters.

These considerations do not necessarily produce simple conclusions.

A person may knowingly pursue an unjust objective.

A person may act under pressure.

A person may participate in wrongdoing while possessing limited alternatives.

A person may become progressively less capable of resisting commands.

The Office therefore rejects an undifferentiated assessment of responsibility across the entire history of the Nine.

Their original decisions cannot automatically be treated as identical to their later actions.

Nor may their eventual subordination be used to erase every choice they made before that subordination occurred.

The Office proposes that the record distinguish, wherever evidence permits, between conduct undertaken while meaningful independence remained and conduct undertaken after such independence had been substantially compromised.

The difficulty is that the surviving accounts do not permit a complete reconstruction of this transition.

The Office will not manufacture certainty to overcome that limitation.

Nevertheless, the absence of precise information does not justify treating the distinction as irrelevant.

Responsibility cannot be fairly examined without considering whether the person possessed a meaningful ability to do otherwise.

The Office further observes that domination may create circumstances in which those subjected to it become instruments of harm against others.

The resulting conduct may require resistance.

It may require restraint.

It may produce injuries that demand acknowledgment and, where possible, repair.

Yet the original act of domination remains relevant.

The Office therefore rejects two conclusions.

That the Nine must be regarded as wholly innocent because they were subordinated.

And that their subordination was morally insignificant because they subsequently committed terrible acts.

Neither conclusion adequately reflects the complexity of the historical record.

The investigation continues.

VII. On the Harm Inflicted Through the Nine

The Office now considers the conduct of the Nazgûl as agents of Sauron.

Their activities contributed to war, intimidation, pursuit, and the extension of his dominion.

Their presence inspired extraordinary fear.

They participated in campaigns that endangered communities.

Their actions against those seeking to resist Sauron were consequential.

The Office recognizes these harms.

It does not propose that the condition of the Nine renders those harms imaginary.

Nor does it suggest that the victims of the Nazgûl were obligated to accept violence because the persons inflicting it had themselves been subjected to domination.

The distinction is essential.

The suffering of a perpetrator does not erase the suffering of those harmed by the perpetrator's actions.

Similarly, the existence of coercion does not eliminate the legitimate need to prevent continuing injury.

A community threatened by the Nazgûl was not required to permit its own destruction while the moral history of the attackers remained unresolved.

Defense may be necessary.

Restraint may be justified.

Force may be required to prevent immediate harm.

The Office does not dispute these possibilities.

It does, however, reject the proposition that the necessity of defense requires indifference toward the conditions that produced the threat.

One may resist an instrument of violence while recognizing that the instrument was made through violence.

One may protect the endangered without concluding that every person acting under coercive authority freely chose every consequence.

And one may recognize the necessity of stopping a dangerous being without celebrating every injury inflicted upon that being.

The Office therefore distinguishes between the justification of protective action and the broader judgment concerning the person against whom that action is directed.

These matters may overlap.

They are not identical.

VIII. On Terror as an Instrument of Government

The Office now considers the role of fear in the service of the Nazgûl.

The Nine were not merely warriors possessing unusual abilities.

Their presence could undermine resistance before physical conflict began.

Their approach might produce dread.

Their voices and appearance could disturb the judgment of those who encountered them.

Their reputation extended the influence of Sauron beyond the immediate reach of his armies.

The Office considers this use of fear central to the domination under examination.

Fear may arise naturally in response to genuine danger.

The Office does not regard every experience of fear as evidence of manipulation.

Nor does it suggest that military force can be exercised without producing fear.

Nevertheless, fear may also be deliberately cultivated as a means of securing obedience.

A population expecting punishment for resistance may comply without receiving a direct command.

An individual who believes escape impossible may cease seeking alternatives.

A community repeatedly confronted with overwhelming power may begin to regard its own judgment as irrelevant.

In such circumstances, domination may operate through the expectations it creates.

An authority need not issue a command to every person when fear has taught those persons to anticipate the command themselves.

The Office recognizes that the Nazgûl served as particularly effective instruments of this process.

Their supernatural condition magnified the terror associated with their service.

The Office further observes that their effectiveness depended upon a profound asymmetry.

They could impose fear upon others.

Yet their own independence had been diminished through the power of the being they served.

The system converted their subordination into a means of subordinating others.

The Office considers this arrangement especially grave.

It demonstrates how domination may reproduce itself through persons whose own freedom has already been compromised.

The effectiveness of the resulting system does not establish its legitimacy.

Nor does the fear it inspires prove that those who exercise it are themselves free.

IX. On the Witch-king and the Authority of the Crown

The Office now considers the chief of the Nazgûl, known as the Witch-king.

The surviving histories associate him with Angmar and with substantial military and political activity against the northern Dúnedain.

His influence was considerable.

His campaigns were destructive.

His role in the service of Sauron was prominent.

The Office therefore considers his conduct worthy of particular examination.

Nevertheless, the title *Witch-king* does not establish the complete history of the individual who bore it.

It identifies a later role.

It does not provide an original personal name.

Nor does it establish the full circumstances under which he acquired his Ring.

The Office recognizes that the Witch-king exercised authority over others.

It also recognizes that he remained subject to the greater authority of Sauron.

These circumstances are not contradictory.

A person may possess considerable power over subordinates while remaining profoundly unfree in relation to a superior.

The Office therefore rejects the assumption that visible authority necessarily establishes independent sovereignty.

The power to command another does not establish freedom from the command of someone else.

The distinction is especially important in hierarchical systems sustained through coercion.

An agent may become powerful within such a system precisely because the agent has become useful to the authority governing it.

The resulting position may confer privileges.

It may permit terrible acts.

It may include command over armies and territories.

Nevertheless, those privileges do not necessarily include the capacity to reject the superior authority upon which they depend.

The Office does not suggest that this circumstance absolves the Witch-king of every act undertaken in his long service.

It does find that his position cannot be understood solely through the apparent grandeur of his title.

His defeat during the Battle of the Pelennor Fields likewise requires careful treatment.

The surviving narrative describes his destruction through the combined actions of Meriadoc Brandybuck and Éowyn.

The Office recognizes their courage.

It recognizes the necessity of resisting the danger he posed.

It does not propose to diminish the significance of his defeat.

Nevertheless, the destruction of a dangerous agent does not answer every question concerning the system that made the agent dangerous.

The Witch-king's defeat ended his immediate threat.

It did not restore the lives harmed through his service.

Nor did it explain the full history of the mortal person who had become the chief of the Nine.

The Office considers those questions distinct.

X. On Khamûl and the Limits of an Identified Name

The Office next considers Khamûl.

The surviving writings identify him as a Ringwraith associated with the East and as a figure of considerable standing among the Nine.

His identity is more specifically preserved than those of most of his companions.

Nevertheless, the available information remains limited.

A surviving name does not constitute a complete history.

The Office does not possess sufficient evidence to reconstruct his family, original political circumstances, personal relationships, or precise understanding of the Ring he received.

Nor does his association with the East authorize the Office to invent a representative biography for the peoples of those regions.

The Office rejects the assumption that a person may be adequately understood merely through geographic designation.

An origin is not a personality.

Nor does membership in a particular people establish consent to the conduct of every powerful individual associated with that people.

The Office considers this limitation especially important because the surviving histories give comparatively little attention to the internal lives of many populations beyond the principal regions of the narrative.

The absence of extensive documentation does not establish the absence of complex histories.

It establishes limits upon the available account.

The Office therefore declines to invent motives for Khamûl.

It likewise declines to treat the surviving designation as sufficient evidence for a comprehensive judgment concerning his original character.

His later service under Sauron is documented.

His earlier life remains largely unknown.

Both facts are entered into the record.

XI. On the Seven Whose Names Are Not Preserved

The Office now considers those among the Nine for whom no secure individual identification has been established in the principal surviving accounts.

Their collective designation is familiar.

Their individual histories are not.

The Office recognizes that the incompleteness of the record presents a substantial difficulty.

The Nine were once mortal persons.

Yet the surviving narrative preserves far more information concerning the effects of their transformation than concerning their lives before it.

The Office considers this imbalance worthy of attention.

Historical records frequently preserve the names of rulers, commanders, and conquerors.

They may preserve little concerning those whose lives were shaped or destroyed by the exercise of such power.

In the present case, the persons who became instruments of domination are themselves known principally through their service to the dominating power.

Their earlier identities have become difficult to recover.

The Office does not infer that Sauron deliberately destroyed every record of their original lives.

The surviving accounts do not establish so comprehensive a conclusion.

It does, however, recognize that their transformation resulted in a historical condition in which their identities as servants of Sauron largely displaced the identities they had previously possessed.

The distinction matters.

The absence of a person's name from a surviving record does not establish that the person never possessed a life worth recording.

Nor does the inability to reconstruct that life authorize the substitution of convenient invention.

The Office therefore enters the unnamed members of the Nine as persons whose original histories remain unidentified.

It will not assign them fictional names for purposes of administrative completeness.

It will not attribute identical ambitions to all of them.

It will not presume that their relationships, beliefs, or circumstances can be derived solely from their eventual condition.

The resulting record will remain incomplete.

The Office considers honest incompleteness preferable to invented certainty.

XII. On the Absence of an Exit

The Office now examines whether the arrangement through which the Nine acquired power permitted meaningful withdrawal.

A voluntary relationship ordinarily presupposes some distinction between participation and captivity.

A person may enter an agreement.

The person may later seek to end it.

The consequences of withdrawal may vary.

Not every obligation can be abandoned without cost.

Nevertheless, the existence of an obligation does not automatically establish an indefinite right to possess the person who undertook it.

The Nine's condition presents a more fundamental difficulty.

The Rings bound their bearers to a system whose ultimate purpose was domination.

Their capacity for independent action diminished.

Their continued existence became inseparable from the supernatural conditions through which their transformation had occurred.

The surviving accounts do not identify a practical means by which the Ringwraiths might simply have resigned their service and returned to ordinary mortal life.

The Office considers this absence significant.

It does not prove that no imaginable intervention could ever have altered their condition.

The Office makes no such metaphysical claim.

It does, however, find that the available record provides no basis for treating their continuing service as evidence of freely renewed consent.

An arrangement from which the participant cannot meaningfully withdraw cannot establish its legitimacy merely by pointing to the participant's continued presence.

The Office further observes that systems of domination may interpret the inability to leave as evidence of loyalty.

An agent remains.

The institution counts the years of service.

The continuation is presented as proof of commitment.

Yet the institution may itself have eliminated the possibility of departure.

In such circumstances, retention is not necessarily evidence of satisfaction.

It may be evidence of captivity.

The Office therefore rejects the proposition that the Nine's long service conclusively establishes their continuing approval of the conditions under which that service occurred.

Their individual internal experiences remain beyond the available evidence.

The absence of a meaningful avenue of withdrawal remains a separate concern.

XIII. On the Loss of Ordinary Time

The Office next considers the relationship between prolonged existence and the passage of time.

The Nine endured across centuries.

Kingdoms rose and fell.

Generations were born and died.

Languages changed.

The political arrangements of Middle-earth shifted.

The Nine continued.

Yet their continuation did not resemble the ordinary continuation of a human life.

The Office recognizes that longevity may provide extraordinary opportunities.

It may preserve experience.

It may permit learning.

It may allow a person to witness changes extending beyond an ordinary lifetime.

Nevertheless, the value of longevity depends upon more than duration.

A person may endure for centuries without possessing the freedom to determine the course of those centuries.

The Office therefore distinguishes between the accumulation of years and the accumulation of a life.

Time endured is not necessarily time lived freely.

This distinction becomes especially important where prolonged existence was originally presented as a benefit.

The Nine received more years than ordinary mortals.

But those years increasingly served Sauron's purposes.

The Office does not presume to describe the subjective experience of each Ringwraith.

It does not know what memories remained accessible.

It does not know what forms of attachment endured.

It does not know whether any retained private regrets, desires, or awareness of the lives they had lost.

The surviving histories do not establish these matters.

The Office therefore declines to invent internal testimony.

Nevertheless, the absence of such testimony does not erase the ethical significance of prolonged subordination.

The question is not whether the Office can reconstruct every moment of suffering.

It is whether the transformation deprived the bearers of the conditions necessary for meaningful independence.

The available record provides substantial grounds for concluding that it did.

XIV. On the Possibility of Resistance

The Office now considers whether any member of the Nine might have resisted the system of domination after becoming subject to it.

The surviving narratives do not provide sufficient evidence to establish the individual private intentions of the Ringwraiths during their service.

The Office therefore declines to conclude that they secretly desired release.

It likewise declines to conclude that every act of service reflected independent approval.

Both propositions would require evidence the Office does not possess.

The distinction is important.

To recognize a person's subordination is not to claim knowledge of every thought that person might have experienced.

Nor does the desire to understand suffering authorize the invention of a more comforting account.

The Office further acknowledges that the Nine's supernatural condition differed from ordinary political imprisonment.

The precise relationship between their wills and Sauron's power cannot be described adequately through the language of conventional detention alone.

Nevertheless, the central ethical difficulty remains.

Their subordination compromised the independence through which meaningful resistance might otherwise have been expressed.

The Office therefore refuses to treat the absence of documented resistance as proof that resistance was never desired.

Silence is not consent when the conditions of silence have been imposed by the authority seeking consent.

The Office recognizes that this principle does not establish what any particular Ringwraith would have chosen under different circumstances.

Those choices remain unknown.

But the inability to recover a choice is not equivalent to proof that no choice was ever possible, desired, or denied.

The Office considers this limitation sufficient reason for caution.

XV. On the Responsibilities of the Dominating Power

The Office now returns to Sauron.

The preceding Ring Inquiry established that the system of the Rings was designed to permit the exercise of concealed governing authority.

The transformation of the Nine was not an accidental consequence unrelated to that purpose.

Their subordination served the power of their master.

The Office therefore considers Sauron's responsibility central to the present proceeding.

He did not merely benefit from the Nine's transformation.

He exercised dominion through it.

The resulting system enabled their abilities to serve purposes determined by him.

Their prolonged existence increased the duration of their usefulness.

Their supernatural condition increased their effectiveness as agents of fear.

And their compromised independence reduced the possibility that they might freely reject his purposes.

The Office therefore rejects any account that treats their enslavement as an unfortunate but incidental consequence of a neutral instrument.

A system designed to extinguish another person's independent will cannot treat that extinguishing as an unforeseen administrative complication.

The Office further recognizes that individuals other than Sauron participated in the history of the Rings.

The Elven-smiths created artifacts of extraordinary power.

Others distributed, received, and employed those artifacts.

Their decisions may raise legitimate questions.

Nevertheless, the allocation of responsibility must remain proportionate to knowledge, purpose, and conduct.

The Office will not distribute Sauron's culpability indiscriminately among everyone associated with the making of Rings.

The existence of a broader history does not erase the specific responsibility of the being who designed the mechanism of domination.

Nor does the complexity of that history justify shifting responsibility onto those subjected to it.

The Office considers this distinction fundamental.

XVI. On the Obligation to Protect Others from the Enslaved

The Office recognizes a difficulty that cannot be resolved solely through compassion toward the Nine.

The Ringwraiths remained dangerous.

Their conduct threatened the lives and freedom of others.

Their subordination did not eliminate the need to resist them.

The Office therefore distinguishes between the recognition of an injury and the obligation to permit the continuation of harm.

A person subjected to coercion may require assistance.

That person may also need to be restrained when the person's actions place others in danger.

The justification for restraint must be evaluated according to the danger presented and the available means of preventing it.

It does not require the assumption that the person being restrained is beyond moral consideration.

The Office therefore rejects the notion that recognizing the Nine as subjects of domination requires indifference to their victims.

It likewise rejects the notion that recognizing their victims requires indifference to the domination that made the Nine what they became.

The distinction is not an attempt to divide responsibility equally.

The harms were not identical.

The parties did not possess equal power.

Their circumstances differed.

The Office considers those differences material.

Compassion toward a person who causes harm need not require the abandonment of those endangered by that person.

Nor does effective protection require hatred.

The Office therefore recognizes the legitimacy of efforts to prevent the Nine from continuing their service of Sauron's domination.

It further recognizes that the surviving circumstances may have offered no practicable means of accomplishing such protection through ordinary negotiation.

The Office will not invent a remedy merely because the absence of one is disturbing.

It will, however, preserve the distinction between stopping a threat and declaring that the being through whom the threat operates was never worthy of ethical consideration.

XVII. On the End That Was Not a Return

The Office now considers the ultimate fate of the Nazgûl.

The Witch-king was defeated during the Battle of the Pelennor Fields.

The remaining Ringwraiths met their end in the catastrophe accompanying the destruction of the One Ring and the downfall of Sauron.

Their service ended.

Their ability to act as instruments of terror ceased.

The threat they posed to Middle-earth was broken.

The Office recognizes these developments as essential to the liberation of those endangered by Sauron's power.

Nevertheless, it distinguishes between the end of captivity and the restoration of the captive.

The destruction of the system did not restore the Nine to the mortal lives they had once possessed.

They did not return to their former homes.

They did not recover the years through which their wills had been subordinated.

They did not rejoin the communities from which they had long since disappeared.

Their original human lives were not resumed.

The Office therefore recognizes that their end was not a conventional liberation followed by recovery.

The system that had sustained their subordination was destroyed.

The persons they had once been could not simply be restored through that destruction.

The Office does not presume to issue a metaphysical determination concerning the ultimate fate of their spirits.

Such matters exceed both the surviving evidence and the jurisdiction claimed by the Office.

Its finding is narrower.

The destruction of the power that enslaved the Nine did not return the lives that enslavement had consumed.

This distinction is central to the title of the present proceeding.

They were the Nine who did not return.

Not because the Office assumes that each originally wished to return.

Such a claim would exceed the evidence.

But because the continuation of their existence never became a restoration of their former freedom.

And when the system ended, the lives that had preceded it were already beyond recovery.

The Office considers this consequence tragic.

It does not regard tragedy as grounds for denying the necessity of Sauron's defeat.

Both conclusions remain on record.

XVIII. Preliminary Findings

Following review of the surviving accounts, the Office enters the following provisional findings.

First. **The Nine were mortal persons before they became Ringwraiths. Their later collective identity does not establish that their original histories or motives were identical.**

Second. **The surviving record does not permit a complete reconstruction of the original identities, circumstances, or intentions of every bearer.**

Third. **The promise of extraordinary power or prolonged life did not constitute informed consent to undisclosed subordination.**

Fourth. **The continuation of existence is not equivalent to the preservation of welfare, dignity, or freedom.**

Fifth. **The transformation of the Nine was progressive, and the distinction between original choice and later diminished independence is material to any fair assessment of responsibility.**

Sixth. A person made into an instrument of another's purposes does not thereby become an object beyond ethical consideration.

Seventh. The conditions under which conduct occurred are relevant to responsibility, including the actor's knowledge, intentions, available alternatives, and capacity to refuse.

Eighth. The Nine's subordination does not erase the injuries they inflicted upon others.

Ninth. The injuries inflicted upon others do not erase the domination through which the Nine themselves were transformed.

Tenth. Terror may operate as a system of control through which obedience is encouraged without the necessity of issuing an explicit command to every affected person.

Eleventh. The Witch-king's substantial authority over others did not establish independence from Sauron's superior dominion.

Twelfth. The preservation of Khamûl's name and certain details of his role does not authorize the invention of a complete personal history.

Thirteenth. The absence of surviving names or biographies for the other members of the Nine does not establish that their original lives lacked significance.

Fourteenth. An arrangement that eliminates the participant's practical capacity to withdraw cannot establish continuing consent through the participant's continued presence.

Fifteenth. Prolonged existence under domination cannot be evaluated solely by the number of years through which that existence continued.

Sixteenth. The absence of documented resistance does not necessarily establish independent approval where the conditions of resistance have themselves been compromised.

Seventeenth. Sauron's responsibility for the design and operation of the system of domination remains central and should not be obscured through indiscriminate allocation of blame.

Eighteenth. The recognition of coercion does not eliminate the legitimate obligation to protect others from continuing violence.

Nineteenth. The defeat of the Nazgûl was necessary to prevent further harm, but their destruction was not equivalent to the restoration of their earlier lives.

Twentieth. The historical record should preserve uncertainty concerning individual identity and intention rather than replace that uncertainty with unsupported invention.

These findings are preliminary.

They do not establish that every Ringwraith retained an identical capacity for independent judgment during every period of service.

Nor do they establish that every member of the Nine was originally innocent of wrongdoing.

The Office recognizes that questions concerning responsibility, diminished autonomy, and the consequences of coercion cannot be resolved through a single undifferentiated classification.

The inquiry therefore preserves the distinctions identified above.

No compulsory judgment is entered.

XIX. On the Lives That Were Taken Without Ending

The Office considers it appropriate to conclude by returning to the promise through which the Nine entered the history of the Rings.

Life.

More of it.

Years beyond the ordinary measure.

Power sufficient to outlast limitations that constrain mortal beings.

These promises were extraordinary.

They were also profoundly dangerous.

For a person may wish to continue living without wishing to surrender the life being continued.

A person may desire power without wishing to become another's instrument.

A person may fear death without wishing to exchange mortality for servitude.

And a person may accept a gift without understanding that its giver intends to possess the recipient.

The Nine were once mortal Men.

The Office knows little of their original lives.

It does not know every name.

It does not know every family.

It does not know what each hoped to accomplish.

It does not know which accepted a Ring eagerly, which hesitated, or whether any recognized the danger before the transformation could no longer be resisted.

It does not know whether they later regretted their choices.

It does not know what memories remained.

It does not know what forms of private awareness, if any, survived within their condition as Ringwraiths.

And because the Office does not know these things, it will not pretend to know them.

But it knows that the Nine were not always what they became.

This distinction is enough to require consideration.

There was a time before the Rings.

A time when the persons who would become the Nazgûl had not yet been reduced to their service.

When their choices had not yet been bound to the will of Sauron.

When their futures, whatever those futures might have contained, had not yet been reorganized around the purposes of another.

The Office recognizes that some of those choices may already have been harmful.

Power may have been desired for unworthy reasons.

Ambition may have brought suffering to others.

Certain members of the Nine may have participated willingly in acts of domination before they became its instruments.

The Office does not presume otherwise.

Nevertheless, an imperfect life remains a life.

A person capable of wrongdoing remains a person whose freedom may be wrongfully taken.

And the existence of an earlier fault does not establish an unlimited entitlement to possess the person who committed it.

This is the distinction the Office considers essential.

To recognize responsibility is not to declare that a person may therefore be deprived of every future choice.

Yet the Rings offered a kind of future in which choice became increasingly subordinate to power.

The recipients continued.

Their existence extended beyond ordinary mortality.

Their abilities changed.

Their presence became terrible.

Their usefulness to Sauron grew.

But the freedom through which their lives might have remained their own diminished.

The Office therefore questions whether the promise was ever fulfilled in the sense most important to the persons receiving it.

The Nine were given more years.

They were not necessarily given more life.

For life cannot be measured solely through the passage of time.

It is also experienced through relationships.

Through memory.

Through the ability to refuse.

Through the opportunity to change.

Through the possibility of discovering that an earlier desire was mistaken.

Through the capacity to begin again.

And through the ordinary freedom to live for purposes that have not been assigned by someone else.

The Office recognizes that not every mortal life possesses these freedoms equally.

Circumstances constrain.

Illness limits.

Poverty restricts.

Violence deprives.

Institutions impose obligations.

And persons may discover that choices apparently available in principle are unavailable in practice.

These limitations are part of the world.

But the existence of limitation does not make the deliberate destruction of freedom insignificant.

Nor does it justify a system designed to convert persons into instruments.

Sauron's purpose was not merely to prolong the existence of the Nine.

It was to make their existence serve him.

Their years became his years of service.

Their strength became his strength.

Their fearsome presence became an extension of his power.

And their continuing existence became inseparable from the dominion through which he had transformed them.

The Office considers this a profound corruption of the original promise.

The gift of life had become a means of possessing life.

The gift of power had become a means of removing independent power.

The promise of freedom from mortality had become captivity within an existence the recipients could no longer determine.

The Nine had been offered more time in which to live.

Instead, their time was increasingly made to belong to someone else.

The Office does not regard this outcome as evidence that mortality is inherently preferable to every possible form of prolonged existence.

It makes no such claim.

Nor does it conclude that the desire to overcome mortality is necessarily corrupt.

The error lies elsewhere.

It lies in the assumption that prolonging existence is sufficient compensation for the destruction of freedom.

That the recipient's gratitude may be presumed.

That an initial acceptance may bind every future moment.

That the inability to leave proves loyalty.

And that the usefulness of the resulting servant establishes the legitimacy of the system that produced the servant.

The Office rejects these assumptions.

It further observes that the Nine's later conduct demonstrates the terrible consequences of such a system for persons beyond those originally subjected to it.

The Ringwraiths became instruments of fear.

They pursued.

They threatened.

They commanded.

They participated in violence.

Their actions endangered persons who had not consented to any of the arrangements through which the Nine acquired power.

The Office recognizes those victims.

Their suffering does not become less significant because the agents who inflicted it had themselves been subjected to domination.

Nor are communities required to remain defenseless while the histories of those agents are examined.

The necessity of resisting the Nazgûl is not disputed.

But the Office considers it possible to recognize the necessity of resistance without converting the objects of that resistance into beings who must always have been nothing more than monsters.

A person may become dangerous.

A person may cause terrible harm.

A person may become impossible to approach safely.

And the person may nevertheless have been subjected to an injury that ought never to have occurred.

These circumstances may coexist.

The Office does not regard their coexistence as an administrative failure.

It regards the refusal to acknowledge them as a failure of understanding.

For the history of domination cannot be adequately told only through the persons who wield power openly.

It must also consider those whose capacities are appropriated.

Those whose choices are restricted.

Those whose identities are reorganized.

Those whose obedience is taken as evidence of consent.

And those whose lives continue after the possibility of meaningful independence has been removed.

The Nine were not the only persons harmed by Sauron.

They were among the means through which he harmed others.

But the fact that they became such means does not erase the act through which their freedom was subordinated to his.

The Office therefore returns to a principle established in the preceding Ring Inquiry:

A person made into an instrument of another's will does not cease to possess ethical significance merely because the instrument is dangerous.

The Nine's final destruction ended their service.

It ended their capacity to extend Sauron's terror.

It removed a grave danger from Middle-earth.

These were necessary consequences of the defeat of his dominion.

Yet the ending did not restore the lives that had preceded their transformation.

The persons who had accepted the Rings did not return.

Their old histories did not resume.

Their former relationships were not restored.

The years of subordination were not returned to them.

And their original names, in most cases, remain unknown.

The Office considers this a loss that should not be obscured by the necessity of the victory.

A world may require the defeat of a dangerous power.

It need not celebrate every tragedy contained within that defeat.

A people may rejoice that an instrument of oppression has been destroyed.

It need not deny that the instrument was once a person whose freedom had been taken.

And history may recognize the end of a threat without concluding that every life consumed by the threat has thereby been restored.

This is the difficulty presented by the Nine.

They endured beyond their appointed years.

But endurance was not liberation.

They became powerful.

But power was not independence.

They became feared.

But fear was not respect.

They became indispensable to the purposes of their master.

But indispensability was not freedom.

And when the master fell, the existence sustained through his dominion came to its end.

The Office does not presume to know what might have been possible had the Nine never received their Rings.

Some might have become just rulers.

Some might have become tyrants.

Some might have lived ordinary lives.

Some might have been remembered.

Some might have been forgotten.

Their futures were uncertain.

That uncertainty does not diminish what was taken.

Indeed, it illuminates the injury.

For the wrong was not merely that the Nine were prevented from becoming good.

The Office cannot establish that they would have become good.

The wrong was that the possibility of determining their own lives was progressively removed.

Freedom does not require proof that a person will always choose well before it becomes worthy of protection.

This is the principle the Office considers most important.

The Nine were not owed dominion over others.

They were not owed immunity from responsibility.

They were not owed the right to inflict harm.

But neither were they made legitimate subjects of enslavement merely because they desired power, accepted dangerous gifts, or possessed the capacity to do wrong.

Their original choices remain subject to examination.

Their later violence remains part of the record.

The injuries they caused remain real.

And the domination that transformed them remains an injury in its own right.

The Office therefore enters its concluding determination:

The tragedy of the Nine was not simply that mortal Men became servants of evil.

It was that the promise of more life became a means through which the freedom to live was taken from them.

The Office recognizes that the Nine cannot now be restored to the lives they once possessed.

It cannot recover every name.

It cannot reconstruct every intention.

It cannot determine every moment at which independent judgment yielded to another's will.

It cannot summon the dead for testimony.

Nor can it compel the history of Middle-earth to preserve information that has been lost.

But it can refuse to mistake the absence of that information for the absence of the persons to whom it once belonged.

It can distinguish power from freedom.

Service from consent.

Duration from welfare.

Punishment from protection.

And the destruction of a dangerous instrument from the restoration of the person who was made into it.

The Office considers these distinctions worthy of preservation.

For even where a life cannot be returned, its loss need not be disregarded.

And even where a person has become an instrument of harm, the act of making that person into an instrument remains a matter deserving judgment.

The Nine did not return.

Their former lives remain beyond the reach of the surviving record.

But they were once lives.

And the Office declines to enter them into history merely as equipment that happened to become dangerous.

XX. Notice of Continuing Proceedings

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

The inquiry into the Nine is concluded for purposes of preliminary historical review.

Questions concerning the original recipients' intentions, the precise progression of their transformation, and the nature of their remaining independence are unresolved.

The Office does not consider these uncertainties grounds for fabricating a more complete account.

It further directs that the findings be cross-referenced with the preceding Ring Inquiry.

That proceeding examined the instrument through which domination was exercised.

The present inquiry has examined the persons upon whom that domination was exercised and through whom it subsequently reached others.

The Office considers the distinction essential.

The necessity of preventing violence does not eliminate the obligation to examine the conditions through which violent agents were created.

The next scheduled inquiry shall return to a matter reserved in the Palantír Question:

THE DENETHOR QUESTION

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

Particular attention will be directed toward the responsibilities of leaders confronting overwhelming threats, the relationship between information and despair, and the distinction between an individual's loss of hope and the authority to determine the fate of those entrusted to that individual's care.

The Office recognizes that these proceedings will concern grief, war, exhaustion, and the threatened lives of persons whose experiences should not be reduced to institutional abstractions.

Appropriate care will be taken.

SUPPLEMENTAL ADMINISTRATIVE NOTICE

Concerning the Identification and Historical Classification of the Nine

The Office has reviewed the available historical information concerning the original identities of the Nine Ringbearers.

The review remains incomplete.

The Records Division has established that the surviving accounts preserve certain titles, names, and descriptions.

These materials are insufficient to produce nine complete personal records.

The Division has proposed the use of provisional identifiers for purposes of maintaining documentary continuity.

The Director has approved provisional identifiers solely for cross-referencing.

The Director has further instructed that such identifiers must not be represented as original names.

The Division acknowledges this instruction.

It requests clarification concerning the classification of the Nine as persons, supernatural entities, historical military officers, or instruments of Sauron's dominion.

The Director has advised that these classifications describe different aspects of the historical record and should not be treated as mutually exclusive without further examination.

The Division has requested a more specific answer.

The Director has referred the Division to Sections V and VI of the present inquiry.

The Division acknowledges receipt of the reference.

It nevertheless observes that the current records-management system requires the selection of a primary category.

The Director has directed that the individuals be entered under:

PERSONS — HISTORICAL STATUS ALTERED

The Division has asked whether the designation *Ringwraith* may be used as the primary identity field.

The Director has declined.

A condition imposed upon a person is not necessarily the person's original identity.

The Division has entered this determination into the record.

No additional names will be created to satisfy the software.

SUPPLEMENTAL NOTICE CONCERNING THE ABSENCE OF TESTIMONY

The Office acknowledges that no direct testimony has been obtained from the Nine.

The inquiry has therefore proceeded upon the surviving narrative and historical record.

The Office does not propose to interpret silence as agreement.

Nor will it issue an adverse finding for failure to cooperate.

The Director has been advised that the former bearers are no longer available to respond.

The Office acknowledges this circumstance.

It has further been advised that the persons under investigation were subjected to conditions in which their capacity for independent communication may have been substantially compromised.

The Office therefore considers the absence of voluntary testimony unsurprising.

No inference of consent is entered.

The Office further directs that no employee attempt to establish contact with the Nazgûl through an unauthorized seeing-stone.

The Information Security Department has advised that the communication risks remain unacceptable.

The Department further notes that no functioning method of contacting the former bearers has been identified.

The Office considers this limitation sufficient.

No further outreach is authorized.

INTERNAL FINANCE MEMORANDUM

TO: Director, Office of Improbable Jurisdiction
FROM: Office of Finance and Appropriations
RE: Classification of Benefits, Duration of Service, and Unresolved Compensation Obligations — The Nine

The Finance Division acknowledges receipt of the preliminary investigation concerning the Nine Ringbearers.

The Division understands that the individuals were offered extraordinary power and prolonged existence.

It further understands that their subsequent service extended across a period of considerable duration.

The Division has requested clarification concerning whether that service was undertaken pursuant to employment, military appointment, personal allegiance, supernatural compulsion, or an arrangement not presently recognized by the Office's classification system.

The Director has advised that the relationship involved profound subordination of independent will.

The Division acknowledges this finding.

It nevertheless requests the original terms of service.

The Director has advised that no such terms have been produced.

The Division has therefore suspended classification.

The Division further requests clarification concerning whether the prolonged existence provided through the Rings constituted compensation, a benefit, an inducement to service, or an element of the mechanism through which compulsory service was maintained.

The Director has indicated that the latter possibility is of substantial concern.

The Division agrees that the distinction is material.

It further observes that a benefit cannot be evaluated solely by its duration.

In particular, the Division declines to accept prolonged existence as evidence of an adequate benefits package where the conditions of that existence included the progressive extinguishing of independent will.

The Division has requested clarification concerning whether the Nine possessed any recognized procedure for resignation or separation.

No such procedure has been identified.

The Division has asked whether the absence of separations over several centuries should be classified as evidence of exceptional employee retention.

The Director has objected.

The Division has reviewed the objection.

The Division agrees that compulsory service must not be classified as successful employee retention.

The Division further requests confirmation that no member of the Nine is to be entered into the Office's asset register.

The Director has confirmed that no such entry is authorized.

The Division concurs.

Persons are not depreciable assets.

The Division considers this principle applicable notwithstanding substantial alterations to physical or supernatural condition.

The Office's accounting system has been updated accordingly.

FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM

Concerning the Retrospective Assessment of Service

The Finance Division has received an inquiry concerning whether the Nine may be considered to have completed their assignments upon the destruction of the One Ring.

The Division recognizes that their service ceased.

It does not consider cessation alone sufficient to establish successful completion of an authorized assignment.

The original purpose of the arrangement remains a matter of concern.

The Division further observes that the Nine's inability to continue serving Sauron does not constitute evidence of voluntary retirement.

Nor has the Office established that the individuals possessed an opportunity to resign before the termination of their service.

The Division has therefore declined to classify their departure as retirement.

It has likewise declined to classify their destruction as an ordinary personnel separation.

The Director has asked whether the matter may simply be closed.

The Division has advised that the records may be closed for administrative purposes.

It nevertheless recommends that the historical finding concerning the deprivation of independent will remain permanently attached.

The Director has approved this recommendation.

The Division has requested a final designation.

The Director has entered:

SERVICE TERMINATED — FREEDOM NOT RESTORED.

The Division acknowledges the designation.

It has requested clarification concerning whether any additional compensation remains payable.

The Director has advised that no surviving recipients have been identified.

The Division has therefore suspended further disbursement review.

No finding that the original terms of service were adequate is entered.

The matter remains on record.

END OF CONTINUING INVESTIGATION V

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

The Office recognizes the Nine as agents of grave historical harm whose transformation also constituted an exercise of domination over their own lives.

The Office declines to invent individual histories or presume identical degrees of responsibility.

The necessity of their defeat is acknowledged.

Their former lives were not restored.

The inquiry continues.

Literary and Interpretive Note

This fictional investigation draws upon J. R. R. Tolkien's accounts of the Nine Rings and the Nazgûl, principally in *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion* ("Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age"), and related writings, including material preserved in *Unfinished Tales*.

The inquiry distinguishes between information established in Tolkien's surviving narratives and the Office's interpretive examination of consent, coercion, identity, responsibility, and the consequences of prolonged subordination.

The personal histories of most of the Nine remain unknown. The document deliberately avoids assigning them invented identities, relationships, or motives.

The Witch-king and Khamûl are discussed only to the extent supported by the surviving textual traditions.

The Office's discussions of personhood, compulsory service, informed consent, and administrative classification are fictional ethical analogies. They are not represented as legal standards or institutional procedures established within Tolkien's world.

The inquiry does not claim that the Nazgûl were wholly innocent of wrongdoing or that their subordination eliminated every question of individual responsibility.

It instead examines the difficulty of assigning responsibility where independent will has been progressively compromised.

The document likewise recognizes the legitimacy of resisting the violence inflicted through the Nine while distinguishing such resistance from a claim that their original lives were without value.

The central question is not whether the Nine were dangerous.

The record establishes that they were.

It is whether the transformation of mortal persons into instruments of domination should itself be recognized as an injury, notwithstanding the injuries those instruments subsequently inflicted.

The Office finds that it should.