OFFICE OF IMPROBABLE JURISDICTION

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

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THE RING INQUIRY

On the Manufacture of Dominion, the Corruption of Consent, and the Burden Placed Upon Those Who Refused Power

A Continuing Inquiry into the Creation and Distribution of the Rings of Power, the Concealment of Their Governing Purpose, the Subordination of Their Bearers, and the Ethical Consequences of Entrusting the Destruction of an Instrument of Dominion to Those Least Equipped to Command It

Office of Improbable Jurisdiction
November 14, 2026

NOTICE OF CONTINUING INVESTIGATION

The Office of Improbable Jurisdiction hereby continues its examination of the conduct and responsibilities of the Maiar, with particular attention to the creation, distribution, and subsequent use of the Rings of Power.

The preceding investigations established several principles relevant to the present proceeding.

The possession of extraordinary power does not, by itself, establish legitimate authority.

The ability to influence another person's judgment does not establish an entitlement to determine that judgment.

The existence of genuine danger does not justify every measure proposed in response.

And access to extraordinary information does not eliminate the limitations of the person interpreting it.

The present inquiry concerns an instrument through which these questions became materially inseparable.

The One Ring was not merely an object of extraordinary power.

It was created for the purpose of establishing dominion over other Rings of Power and, through them, their bearers.

Its manufacture involved the investment of substantial power by its maker, Sauron.

Its intended operation depended upon a relationship between the power concentrated within the One and the powers embodied in the other Rings.

The Office considers this arrangement worthy of particular scrutiny.

A device designed to exercise authority over another device may present an ordinary technical question.

A device designed to exercise authority over another person's will presents a different question.

The distinction does not disappear merely because the mechanism is ancient, ingenious, or difficult to understand.

Nor does the beauty of an object establish the legitimacy of the purposes for which it was made.

The Office therefore proposes to examine the Rings not only as artifacts of extraordinary craftsmanship, but as instruments through which power was distributed, concealed, concentrated, and exercised.

The investigation will distinguish among the purposes of their makers, the knowledge of their recipients, the intentions of their bearers, and the consequences of their use.

These matters are related.

They are not identical.

The Office further observes that the destruction of the One Ring required an undertaking of extraordinary danger.

That undertaking was entrusted, ultimately, to a Hobbit.

The Office has previously examined the protection afforded to Frodo Baggins under its Ringbearer Protection proceedings.

Those findings remain relevant.

The successful destruction of the Ring does not extinguish the questions concerning the burdens imposed upon those responsible for bringing about its destruction.

Nor does the eventual defeat of Sauron establish that every decision made along the way was free from ethical difficulty.

The Office therefore enters the following preliminary principle:

An instrument designed to govern the will of another cannot establish its legitimacy merely by demonstrating the usefulness of the power it provides.

The inquiry proceeds.

I. On the Making of the Rings

The Office first considers the circumstances surrounding the creation of the Rings of Power.

The surviving histories describe the work of the Elven-smiths of Eregion, whose achievements included artifacts of extraordinary craftsmanship.

The Office recognizes that the pursuit of knowledge and the making of beautiful or useful things are not inherently suspect.

Craft may serve life.

Knowledge may preserve what would otherwise be lost.

The creation of an instrument capable of altering the conditions of existence does not automatically establish an intention to dominate.

The Office therefore distinguishes between the aspirations of the Elven-smiths and the purposes pursued by Sauron.

The Elves possessed reasons for desiring preservation.

They had experienced loss.

They understood the changes wrought by time.

They wished to retain beauty and resist the diminishment of things they loved.

Such desires were not identical to Sauron's ambition to establish control over the inhabitants of Middle-earth.

Nevertheless, the Office recognizes that the desire to preserve something may create vulnerabilities of its own.

A person who fears loss may become receptive to promises of permanence.

A community that treasures its history may welcome an instrument capable of delaying change.

An institution that has suffered repeated injury may seek increasingly powerful means of ensuring that injury never occurs again.

These desires may be understandable.

Their reasonableness does not eliminate the need to examine the conditions under which a proposed remedy is offered.

The Office therefore rejects any assumption that the Elven-smiths' interest in preservation made them responsible for Sauron's concealed intentions.

It also rejects the proposition that benevolent intentions necessarily protect a maker from the consequences of relying upon an untrustworthy collaborator.

The two questions require separate consideration.

A person may seek to preserve what is beautiful and nevertheless become entangled in a system designed to possess it.

The Office considers this danger central to the history of the Rings.

II. On Annatar and the Offer of Assistance

The Office next considers Sauron's appearance among the Elven-smiths under the guise of Annatar, the Lord of Gifts.

The title deserves attention.

A gift ordinarily suggests a benefit offered without an equivalent obligation imposed upon its recipient.

The Office recognizes that gifts may strengthen relationships.

They may communicate generosity.

They may provide assistance where assistance is needed.

They may permit the recipient to accomplish something otherwise impossible.

Nevertheless, the outward form of a gift does not establish that the giver acts without ulterior purpose.

A person may offer knowledge while concealing the consequences of its use.

A person may provide assistance for the purpose of creating dependence.

A person may present a powerful instrument as a benefit while retaining an undisclosed means of control over its operation.

In such circumstances, the language of generosity may conceal the architecture of domination.

The Office therefore distinguishes between the receipt of a benefit and informed acceptance of the conditions attached to that benefit.

A gift that secretly transfers control to the giver is not made legitimate by the recipient's gratitude.

The Office further observes that Sauron's deception did not require the Elven-smiths to abandon their legitimate interests.

Rather, it exploited those interests.

The desire to preserve beauty became an opportunity for manipulation.

The desire to exercise craft became an avenue for concealed influence.

The promise of knowledge created a relationship through which the giver could participate in the making of instruments whose ultimate purpose had not been disclosed.

The Office considers this method particularly dangerous.

An adversary need not always persuade another person to pursue an openly destructive objective.

It may be sufficient to persuade that person to accept assistance toward an objective already considered desirable.

The resulting relationship may appear cooperative.

The hidden intention may be entirely otherwise.

The Office therefore enters the following preliminary finding:

Consent to assistance does not constitute consent to an undisclosed system of control embedded within that assistance.

No adverse finding is entered against the recipients merely because the deception succeeded.

The inquiry continues.

III. On the Concealment of Governing Authority

The Office now turns to the relationship between the One Ring and the other Rings of Power.

Sauron secretly forged the One Ring in order to exercise mastery over the others.

The One was not simply another artifact within a collection of powerful objects.

It was intended to occupy a controlling position within the system.

The Office considers this distinction fundamental.

An arrangement may appear to distribute power among multiple participants.

Each participant may possess an instrument capable of producing substantial benefits.

The arrangement may encourage the impression that authority has been dispersed.

Yet if one participant retains an undisclosed means of overriding the others, the apparent distribution of power may conceal a central structure of domination.

The Office refers to this circumstance as **concealed governing authority**.

The term describes a system in which those exercising apparently independent powers remain subject to a controlling mechanism they have not knowingly accepted.

The Office recognizes that not every coordinated system is illegitimate.

Shared standards may facilitate cooperation.

Common mechanisms may permit communication.

Mutual reliance may produce benefits unavailable to isolated participants.

But cooperation requires a meaningful distinction between participation and subordination.

The existence of an undisclosed controlling power defeats that distinction.

Interoperability is not consent.

Nor does participation in a shared system establish agreement to every use of that system by its designer.

The Office finds that the One Ring was intended to convert the powers of other bearers into avenues through which Sauron's own authority could be extended.

Its purpose was therefore not merely to increase his personal capabilities.

It was to compromise the independence of those who possessed other Rings.

This design is material to the inquiry.

An artifact intended to assist its bearer may be evaluated through the purposes it serves.

An artifact intended to override the will of other bearers must also be evaluated through the autonomy it threatens.

The Office therefore rejects any characterization of the One Ring as an ordinary instrument whose ethical significance depended entirely upon the preferences of whoever happened to possess it.

Its design embodied a purpose.

That purpose was domination.

IV. On the Three Rings and the Preservation of What Was Loved

The Office recognizes that the Three Rings held by the Elves occupy a distinct position within the history under review.

They were made by Celebrimbor without Sauron's direct participation in their making.

They were not handled by him.

Nevertheless, their powers remained bound to the fate of the One Ring.

The distinction is significant.

The absence of direct participation by an adversary in the creation of a particular instrument does not necessarily eliminate vulnerabilities inherited from a wider system of knowledge or power.

The Office recognizes that Celebrimbor's purposes were not identical to Sauron's.

Nor does it infer that the bearers of the Three knowingly accepted subordination to the One.

Indeed, the recognition of Sauron's purpose prompted resistance.

The Elves perceived the danger and withheld the use of their Rings while the One remained under Sauron's control.

The Office considers this response relevant to the question of consent.

The discovery of an undisclosed condition may provide grounds for rejecting an arrangement previously accepted in ignorance of that condition.

The Office further observes that the Three were associated with preservation, healing, and resistance to decay.

These purposes were not inherently coercive.

Yet their relationship with the One created a profound difficulty.

The destruction of the instrument of domination would also bring an end to the continued exercise of powers through which beloved places had been preserved.

The Office considers this consequence tragic rather than administratively convenient.

The destruction of the One did not simply remove an evil artifact while leaving every legitimate use of power unaffected.

It altered the conditions under which other powers could continue.

Something was lost.

The Office therefore rejects the assumption that the removal of an illegitimate system necessarily occurs without cost to those who relied upon it for legitimate purposes.

A harmful dependency may support real goods.

Its termination may be necessary.

The loss of those goods may nevertheless deserve recognition.

The necessity of relinquishing a power does not establish that everything sustained by that power was without value.

The Office considers this distinction especially important where the alternative to relinquishment would be continued vulnerability to domination.

V. On the Seven Rings and the Burden of Desire

The Office next considers the Rings that came into the possession of the Dwarves.

The surviving histories indicate that the Dwarves were not subjected to Sauron's will in the same manner as the Men who received the Nine.

Their nature and resistance limited the controlling effects Sauron had intended.

Nevertheless, the Seven were associated with an intensification of the desire for wealth and the accumulation of treasure.

The Office recognizes that the creation, possession, and enjoyment of beautiful or valuable things are not inherently improper.

A craftsperson may take legitimate pride in excellent work.

A community may preserve objects of historical importance.

Wealth may provide security, support institutions, and enable acts of generosity.

The Office therefore rejects any finding that the Dwarves' love of craftsmanship or treasure rendered them inherently corrupt.

The question concerns the alteration of desire through an instrument whose governing purpose was concealed.

The Office distinguishes between ordinary attachment and the artificial intensification of attachment through a system designed to serve another's ambitions.

A person may desire wealth.

It does not follow that the person has consented to an external power manipulating that desire.

Nor does a preexisting inclination establish that every subsequent consequence of its amplification must be attributed solely to the individual.

A vulnerability does not become an authorization merely because it existed before it was exploited.

The Office further recognizes that the consequences associated with the Seven differed from those associated with the Nine.

The distinction must be preserved.

The Rings did not act upon every bearer in an identical manner.

Nor did their failure to produce identical effects establish that they were harmless.

The Office therefore declines to issue a single undifferentiated finding concerning all recipients of the Rings of Power.

Different bearers experienced different consequences.

Their circumstances require separate consideration.

The inquiry continues.

VI. On the Nine and the Extinguishing of the Will

The Office now considers the Nine Rings given to mortal Men.

Their eventual bearers became the Nazgûl, the Ringwraiths.

The Office regards this development as among the most serious consequences of the system under review.

The Rings offered extraordinary power and prolonged existence.

But the prolongation of life was not equivalent to the preservation of freedom.

Over time, the bearers became increasingly subject to the dominion of Sauron.

Their identities and independent wills were diminished within the service imposed upon them.

The Office considers this result a fundamental violation of the distinction between assistance and domination.

A person may desire a longer life.

The desire does not establish consent to the surrender of that life into another's possession.

A person may desire influence.

The desire does not establish consent to the extinguishing of independent judgment.

A person may accept a powerful gift.

Acceptance does not establish agreement to consequences deliberately concealed by the giver.

The promise of more life does not justify the destruction of the freedom through which life is lived.

The Office further recognizes that the individual histories of the Nine are incompletely preserved.

Some may have possessed substantial power before receiving their Rings.

Some may have pursued ambitions that contributed to their vulnerability.

Others may have entered arrangements whose true consequences they could not reasonably anticipate.

The Office will not invent individual motives to produce a more complete account than the surviving evidence permits.

Nor will it presume that every bearer was wholly innocent of every action undertaken before or after receiving a Ring.

The question of individual responsibility remains distinct from the question of whether Sauron's system was designed to subjugate them.

The latter is sufficiently established by the purpose and consequences of the Rings.

The Office therefore enters a preliminary finding:

The transformation of a recipient into an instrument of another's will cannot be justified by reference to the benefits originally offered to that recipient.

The Office recognizes that the Nazgûl became agents of terrible harm.

It does not consider this fact sufficient reason to disregard the process through which their subordination was accomplished.

The history of domination must include its consequences for those who become its instruments.

VII. On the One Ring as an Instrument of Institutional Capture

The Office now examines the nature of the One Ring itself.

The Ring was not simply a source of personal strength.

Its creation involved Sauron's investment of substantial power into an object intended to extend his capacity for domination.

The Office recognizes that this investment created an unusual relationship between the maker and the instrument.

Sauron's own power became bound to the Ring.

The Ring's destruction would therefore diminish him beyond recovery as a power capable of renewing his former dominion.

The Office considers this arrangement significant.

An institution may become dependent upon an instrument created to advance its purposes.

The instrument may concentrate authority.

It may coordinate systems otherwise independent.

It may strengthen the institution's capacity to act.

But the concentration of authority may also create a corresponding concentration of vulnerability.

The Office does not suggest that Sauron consciously designed the Ring for his eventual defeat.

It observes that his decision to concentrate so much power in a single instrument made the preservation of that instrument essential to the continuation of his dominion.

The instrument created to secure control became the condition upon which control depended.

The Office further recognizes that the Ring's apparent usefulness to potential opponents was among its most dangerous qualities.

It offered access to extraordinary power.

It appeared to provide a means of confronting the very authority that had created it.

Its possession could be imagined as a solution to the danger posed by its maker.

Yet the power it offered was inseparable from the purposes for which it had been made.

The temptation was not merely to become stronger.

It was to believe that domination could be rendered legitimate by changing the person exercising it.

The Office therefore distinguishes between the removal of an illegitimate ruler and the preservation of the ruler's methods under new management.

The former may constitute liberation.

The latter may merely transfer authority within the same structure of coercion.

The replacement of the hand that holds an instrument of domination does not necessarily change what the instrument was designed to do.

The Office considers this principle central to the inquiry.

VIII. On the Proposal to Use the Ring for Good

The Office acknowledges that several individuals considered, or were confronted with, the possibility of using the One Ring against Sauron.

The attraction of this proposal should not be dismissed as irrational.

Sauron presented an extraordinary danger.

The Ring possessed extraordinary power.

It might appear reasonable to employ the enemy's own instrument against him.

The Office therefore recognizes that the temptation to use the Ring could arise from sincere concern for others.

A person might wish to protect a community.

To end a war.

To prevent further suffering.

To establish peace.

These are legitimate objectives.

The Office nevertheless observes that a desirable objective does not establish the legitimacy of every means available to accomplish it.

The question must include the character of the instrument.

A tool may be redirected toward purposes different from those envisioned by its maker.

But some instruments exercise their effects through mechanisms that cannot be separated from the harm they produce.

An instrument designed to dominate the wills of others presents precisely such a difficulty.

The Office therefore rejects the assumption that sufficiently benevolent intentions could transform the One Ring into a neutral means of public administration.

The claim that domination will be exercised for the benefit of the dominated does not resolve the objection to domination.

The Office acknowledges that a powerful person might initially resist the Ring's influence.

Such resistance does not establish that possession would remain harmless indefinitely.

Nor does the capacity to withstand temptation on one occasion guarantee immunity from subsequent temptation.

The Office considers the refusal of the Ring by Gandalf and Galadriel especially relevant.

Their refusals recognized not merely the possibility that power could be misused, but the danger of believing that their own goodness would make its use legitimate.

A person may begin with the desire to preserve life.

The person may then come to regard opposition as a threat to that preservation.

The desire to protect may become a demand for obedience.

And the hoped-for peace may become indistinguishable from the absence of anyone permitted to disagree.

The Office therefore enters the following principle:

Good intentions do not automatically neutralize the moral character of the power through which those intentions are pursued.

The inquiry continues.

IX. On the Refusal of Power

The Office now considers refusal as an affirmative exercise of judgment.

In ordinary accounts of power, significance is frequently assigned to acquisition.

A person gains authority.

A ruler obtains a territory.

An institution expands its reach.

A powerful object passes into new hands.

These developments are often described as achievements.

The refusal of power may receive comparatively little attention.

It may be mistaken for weakness.

For hesitation.

For an unwillingness to accept responsibility.

The Office rejects this assumption.

A person may refuse authority because the authority is illegitimate.

A person may reject an instrument because its operation would require harm.

A person may decline an advantage because the advantage depends upon the subordination of others.

Such refusals may require considerable courage.

They may also be costly.

The Office therefore distinguishes between the inability to exercise power and the decision not to exercise power one might otherwise possess.

Restraint is not necessarily the absence of capacity. It may be the deliberate limitation of capacity in recognition of another's freedom.

The Office finds this distinction central to the conduct of Gandalf.

It is likewise relevant to Galadriel.

Both understood that the Ring could offer extraordinary possibilities.

Both recognized the danger that its possession presented.

The Office does not suggest that every refusal in Middle-earth was motivated by identical considerations.

Nor does it regard all refusals as equally significant.

It does, however, recognize that the willingness to relinquish a desirable instrument may reveal an understanding of authority that its acquisition would have concealed.

The Office therefore enters no adverse finding against those who refused the One Ring.

It further declines to characterize their refusal as a failure to employ available resources.

The Finance Division has been advised that this determination does not concern ordinary procurement procedures.

X. On the Custody of the Ring

The Office next considers the successive custody of the One Ring.

The Ring passed through the possession of individuals whose knowledge, intentions, and circumstances differed substantially.

The Office recognizes that these differences are material.

The finder of a dangerous object may not understand its nature.

A custodian may accept responsibility without knowing its full consequences.

A later bearer may possess information unavailable to earlier holders.

And a person may inherit an obligation arising from decisions in which that person had no part.

The Office therefore rejects the assumption that possession alone establishes uniform responsibility.

The meaning of custody depends upon what the custodian knew, what the custodian intended, what alternatives were available, and what actions were reasonably possible.

The Office further recognizes that the Ring exerted influence upon those who possessed it.

Its capacity to encourage attachment and resistance to relinquishment complicated ordinary understandings of voluntary possession.

A bearer might initially accept the Ring for reasons unrelated to domination.

The relationship could nevertheless become increasingly difficult to end.

The Office considers this significant.

An obligation that becomes progressively more difficult to relinquish may cease to resemble the voluntary undertaking through which it began.

The Office does not propose that every bearer was deprived of independent will at every moment.

The surviving histories do not support such a conclusion.

It does find that the Ring's influence must be considered when evaluating the decisions of those who carried it.

The mere fact that an individual continued to possess the Ring does not establish continued, unqualified consent to every burden associated with that possession.

The Office therefore recommends that the circumstances of each custodian be examined separately.

A continuous chain of custody does not constitute a continuous chain of identical intentions.

XI. On Isildur and the Claim of Compensation

The Office now considers Isildur's decision to retain the One Ring following Sauron's defeat at the end of the Second Age.

The surviving accounts describe his claim to the Ring as compensation for the deaths of his father and brother.

The Office recognizes the gravity of those losses.

The desire for compensation following profound injury is not inherently illegitimate.

Nor does grief eliminate the possibility of reasoned judgment.

Nevertheless, the Office distinguishes between a legitimate claim arising from injury and the legitimacy of the specific object claimed in satisfaction of that injury.

A person may have suffered a wrong.

It does not follow that every available means of compensation is appropriate.

Nor does the defeat of an aggressor establish that an instrument designed for domination may safely become the private possession of one of the victors.

The legitimacy of a grievance does not establish the legitimacy of every remedy pursued in its name.

The Office considers this distinction especially relevant where the object claimed presents substantial danger beyond the claimant.

The One Ring did not cease to embody Sauron's purposes merely because Sauron had been defeated.

Its continued existence preserved the possibility of renewed domination.

The Office further recognizes that Isildur's later history was tragic.

His death and the loss of the Ring contributed to the continuation of the danger.

The Office does not propose to reduce the complex circumstances of his decision to a simple failure of character.

The influence of the Ring, the circumstances of victory, and the personal losses he had endured are material to the inquiry.

Nevertheless, the Office finds that the decision to retain the Ring illustrates the danger of treating a powerful instrument as an appropriate object of personal compensation.

A victory may establish the defeat of an enemy.

It does not necessarily establish a right to possess everything the enemy formerly controlled.

The Office considers this principle applicable beyond the circumstances of the present proceeding.

XII. On Bilbo Baggins and the Ordinary Possessor

The Office next considers Bilbo Baggins.

Bilbo did not seek the One Ring for the purpose of establishing dominion over Middle-earth.

He encountered the object under circumstances in which its true history and purpose were unknown to him.

Its immediate usefulness was apparent.

Its broader danger was not.

The Office considers this distinction important.

A person may adopt a tool because it accomplishes an immediate purpose.

The person may reasonably lack knowledge of systems, interests, or consequences concealed within it.

The apparent simplicity of the tool's operation may encourage the assumption that its significance is equally simple.

Bilbo's possession of the Ring gradually became an attachment.

The difficulty he experienced in relinquishing it demonstrates that an object may exert influence beyond the purposes for which its possessor initially accepted it.

The Office therefore distinguishes between the circumstances of acquisition and the conditions of continued possession.

An object may enter a person's life as a convenience.

It may subsequently become a dependency.

The Office does not suggest that Bilbo's experience was identical to those of the bearers of the Nine.

It was not.

Nor does it imply that every useful possession contains an undisclosed instrument of domination.

It does, however, identify a general concern.

The ordinary appearance of an object does not establish that its consequences are ordinary.

The Office further observes that Bilbo's eventual relinquishment of the Ring was an achievement of considerable significance.

It required assistance.

It required struggle.

It was not accomplished without difficulty.

The Office does not consider these circumstances evidence that the act was without value.

A person who relinquishes a harmful attachment with difficulty has nevertheless relinquished it.

The difficulty may make the achievement more significant, not less.

The Office therefore enters no adverse finding against Bilbo Baggins.

It recognizes the importance of his decision.

XIII. On the Appointment of the Ringbearer

The Office now returns to Frodo Baggins.

The Ring came into Frodo's possession through circumstances not of his own making.

He did not participate in its manufacture.

He did not consent to its original purpose.

He did not create the conditions under which its destruction became necessary.

Nevertheless, he eventually undertook responsibility for carrying it toward the place where it could be destroyed.

The Office recognizes the significance of his voluntary acceptance of that undertaking.

It likewise recognizes the extraordinary pressure created by the circumstances in which the decision occurred.

Middle-earth faced a grave danger.

The Ring could not safely remain where it was.

Its destruction appeared necessary to prevent Sauron's return to full dominion.

And the available alternatives were profoundly limited.

The Office therefore distinguishes between voluntary courage and the absence of external pressure.

A person may freely decide to undertake a dangerous task while recognizing that the surrounding circumstances leave few acceptable alternatives.

The decision may be admirable.

The limitations upon choice remain relevant.

The nobility of an undertaking does not eliminate the responsibilities of those who ask another person to undertake it.

The Office further acknowledges that Frodo was not selected because he possessed an overwhelming capacity to dominate others.

Indeed, his comparative lack of such power formed part of the circumstances that made his undertaking possible.

This creates an important ethical difficulty.

The person least attracted to the exercise of domination may become the person upon whom the burden of destroying its instrument is placed.

The Office does not suggest that this burden was deliberately assigned as punishment.

It does observe that the absence of ambition is not equivalent to an absence of vulnerability.

A person may be humble.

The person may be courageous.

The person may possess extraordinary endurance.

None of these qualities establishes that the person can suffer indefinitely without harm.

The Office therefore incorporates its earlier Ringbearer Protection findings into the present inquiry.

The destruction of the Ring was necessary.

The burden imposed upon its bearer remains a matter deserving care.

XIV. On the Burden That Increased

The Office now considers the effects of prolonged exposure to the One Ring.

The burden of carrying the Ring was not static.

Its influence increased as the undertaking approached its conclusion.

Frodo's physical exhaustion, psychological distress, and growing difficulty in resisting the Ring are material to any assessment of his conduct.

The Office recognizes that responsibility must be considered in relation to capacity.

A task that remains possible under ordinary conditions may become impossible under conditions of extraordinary fatigue, pain, coercion, or diminished judgment.

The Office therefore rejects the proposition that a person's earlier willingness to undertake a burden establishes an unlimited future capacity to bear it.

Consent to begin a difficult undertaking does not transform the person undertaking it into an inexhaustible resource.

The Office further observes that the significance of Frodo's suffering cannot be measured solely by the fact that the mission eventually succeeded.

The Ring was destroyed.

Frodo nevertheless endured injuries whose consequences continued beyond that destruction.

The preservation of Middle-earth did not erase the cost borne by the person who carried the instrument of its possible enslavement.

The Office recognizes that the language of heroism may provide appropriate acknowledgment of courage.

It cautions, however, against employing heroism as a substitute for consideration of injury.

To call someone a hero is not necessarily to understand what happened to him.

To celebrate his achievement is not necessarily to provide what he requires afterward.

And to remember the world that was saved is not necessarily to remember the person who could not return unchanged to the world he helped preserve.

The Office therefore enters a preliminary principle:

A successful mission does not extinguish the duty to recognize the suffering through which that success was achieved.

The inquiry continues.

XV. On Samwise Gamgee and the Labor of Continuance

The Office now considers the role of Samwise Gamgee.

Its earlier Ringbearer Protection proceedings recognized the extraordinary contribution of Samwise to Frodo's survival and the continuation of the mission.

Those findings remain in effect.

The present inquiry examines his conduct in relation to the Ring itself.

Samwise briefly carried the Ring under circumstances of extreme danger.

The surviving accounts indicate that he experienced its temptation.

He nevertheless relinquished it to Frodo.

The Office considers this significant.

Samwise did not lack desires.

He did not lack imagination.

He was capable of envisioning the benefits that extraordinary power might appear to offer.

But the purposes he valued were not naturally expressed through dominion.

His aspirations included the care of living things.

The making of gardens.

The preservation of ordinary life.

The Office recognizes that such desires are not inherently immune from corruption.

Indeed, the temptation presented by the Ring could attach itself to the desire to make things grow.

The danger lay in converting care into mastery.

A garden imposed upon the entire world through irresistible power would no longer be merely a garden.

It would be a world arranged according to one gardener's command.

The Office therefore finds Samwise's refusal especially meaningful.

The desire to make something beautiful does not establish a right to determine what everything else must become.

The Office further observes that Samwise's most important contribution to the mission cannot be reduced to his brief custody of the Ring.

He cooked.

He watched.

He carried supplies.

He encouraged Frodo.

He protected him.

And, when Frodo could no longer continue without assistance, Sam carried him.

The Office regards these acts as central rather than incidental.

The destruction of a great instrument of domination depended upon forms of labor that did not themselves resemble the exercise of great power.

The Office therefore returns to a finding entered in its earlier proceedings:

Heroism is not a substitute for duty of care.

It adds a related observation:

Nor is the absence of spectacular power evidence that a person's contribution is without consequence.

The Office considers the distinction essential.

XVI. On Sméagol and the Person Who Was Not Merely an Obstacle

The Office now considers Sméagol, called Gollum.

The surviving histories describe a life profoundly altered by possession of the One Ring.

The Office recognizes that Sméagol committed serious wrongdoing.

His acquisition and prolonged possession of the Ring were associated with violence, secrecy, isolation, and degradation.

The Office does not propose to erase that conduct.

Nor does it suggest that the influence of the Ring eliminates every question of personal responsibility.

Nevertheless, the Office rejects the proposition that Sméagol's history may be understood solely through the harms he caused.

He was also a person upon whom the Ring exercised destructive influence over an extraordinary period.

His life was diminished.

His relationships were destroyed.

His identity became increasingly entangled with the object he could neither safely possess nor willingly relinquish.

The Office therefore considers his circumstances relevant to the question of exploitation through dependency.

A person may become dangerous through a relationship that has also profoundly harmed him.

The danger may require restraint.

The harm may nevertheless deserve recognition.

The Office further observes that Frodo's treatment of Sméagol differed from the treatment that might have followed a purely instrumental assessment.

Sméagol was dangerous.

He was unreliable.

He had committed serious wrongs.

He also possessed knowledge that could assist the mission.

It would have been possible to regard him solely as a resource, an obstacle, or a threat.

Frodo's willingness to recognize something more complicated in him was ethically consequential.

The Office does not presume that compassion guaranteed Sméagol's reform.

It did not.

Nor does it suggest that every act of mercy produces a beneficial outcome.

Mercy is not a mechanism through which one person acquires control over another's future conduct.

Its value cannot be reduced to the certainty of a desirable result.

To recognize that a person has done harm is not necessarily to conclude that the person has ceased to be a person.

The Office considers this distinction important.

It further notes that Sméagol's continued existence became decisive to the final destruction of the Ring.

This circumstance raises questions that cannot adequately be resolved through ordinary calculations of deservingness.

The inquiry proceeds.

XVII. On the Failure That Was Not the End

The Office now addresses the events at the Sammath Naur.

Frodo reached the place where the One Ring could be destroyed.

At the final moment, he did not voluntarily relinquish it.

He claimed the Ring.

The Office recognizes this fact.

It does not consider the record served by denying it.

Neither does it consider the fact sufficient to establish that Frodo's undertaking was without value or that his suffering demonstrated a personal moral deficiency.

The Ring exerted extraordinary influence.

Frodo had endured prolonged exposure, exhaustion, fear, pain, and the gradual erosion of his capacity to resist.

The conditions at the place of its making intensified the danger.

The Office therefore rejects any assessment that treats the final decision as though it occurred under ordinary circumstances.

The fact that a person reaches the limit of endurance does not establish that every effort made before reaching that limit was meaningless.

The Office further recognizes that the Ring was ultimately destroyed through the actions of Sméagol, whose struggle with Frodo resulted in the Ring's fall into the fire.

The outcome was not the product of an orderly execution of the original plan.

Nor did it occur because every participant maintained perfect judgment until the undertaking was complete.

The history was more complicated.

Mercy had permitted Sméagol to remain alive.

Frodo's endurance had brought the Ring to the place of its destruction.

Samwise's loyalty had sustained the journey.

The decisions of many others had created the possibility of reaching that place.

And the final result arose through circumstances none of them had fully controlled.

The Office considers this complexity essential to the record.

The destruction of the Ring cannot be adequately understood through a simple division between those who succeeded and those who failed.

Nor may the final outcome be used to erase the ethical significance of earlier choices.

A compassionate act may matter even when it does not produce the result its author intended.

An undertaking may be worthy even when its final completion exceeds the strength of the person entrusted with it.

And a desirable outcome may depend upon events that no participant could have guaranteed.

The success of a mission does not establish that its participants possessed complete control over the means of its success.

The Office therefore declines to enter an adverse finding against Frodo Baggins based solely upon his inability to relinquish the Ring at the final moment.

The limitations of his endurance are entered into the record.

So are the extraordinary circumstances under which those limitations were reached.

The Office considers both necessary to a fair account.

XVIII. On Mercy and the Limits of Calculation

The Office now considers a difficulty presented by the foregoing events.

Institutions frequently evaluate decisions through their anticipated consequences.

A proposed act may be approved because it is expected to produce a benefit.

A person may be considered useful because that person's cooperation advances an objective.

A risk may be accepted because the expected reward appears sufficient.

Such calculations may be necessary.

The Office does not reject the use of judgment concerning consequences.

It does, however, reject the proposition that the moral worth of every act can be established solely by the result ultimately produced.

The treatment of Sméagol illustrates this difficulty.

At several points, his continued survival appeared to present danger.

His intentions were unreliable.

His attachment to the Ring remained powerful.

He could not reasonably be treated as a secure or predictable ally.

Nevertheless, he was not killed merely because he might cause future harm.

The Office recognizes that restraint in the exercise of power may preserve possibilities whose future significance cannot be known.

This does not establish that mercy will always prove strategically advantageous.

Nor does it establish that a person must disregard every danger posed by someone who has committed wrongdoing.

It establishes something narrower.

The inability to guarantee a beneficial outcome does not, by itself, render compassion irrational.

The Office further observes that an individual spared through mercy does not thereby become the property of the person who showed mercy.

Nor does the recipient acquire an obligation to produce a desirable result.

Mercy is not a purchase.

It is not a contractual exchange.

It is not an investment whose legitimacy depends upon eventual repayment.

The Office therefore rejects any interpretation under which the mercy shown to Sméagol is justified solely because his eventual actions contributed to the destruction of the Ring.

That consequence matters to the history.

It does not exhaust the ethical significance of the earlier decisions.

The Office considers this distinction particularly important in a proceeding concerning an instrument designed to turn the lives and wills of others toward the purposes of its maker.

To treat mercy merely as a technique for securing a desired outcome would risk reproducing, in a different form, the instrumental reasoning the inquiry has sought to examine.

The Office therefore enters the following principle:

Compassion need not be justified by proving that the person who receives it will become useful.

The finding is entered without qualification.

XIX. On the Destruction of the Instrument

The Office now considers the destruction of the One Ring as a remedy.

The Ring could not be safely confined through ordinary means.

Its continued existence preserved the possibility of renewed domination by Sauron.

Its power could not be separated from the purposes embodied in its making.

The Office therefore recognizes substantial grounds for concluding that destruction was necessary.

Nevertheless, the Office distinguishes destruction of the instrument from restoration of every injury caused through its existence.

The defeat of Sauron did not restore the lives lost under his dominion.

It did not erase the suffering endured by those who had carried the Ring.

It did not restore the former capacities of the Three.

It did not reverse every alteration to the world produced through the long history of the Rings.

The Office considers these consequences relevant.

The removal of a source of harm is not identical to the repair of every harm that source has caused.

The Office further recognizes that the destruction of the One Ring brought changes that were not uniformly experienced as liberation from loss.

For the Elves, the diminishing of the Three marked the end of a form of preservation intimately connected with places and histories they loved.

The Office does not regard those losses as proof that the One should have been preserved.

It regards them as evidence that necessary decisions may still carry tragic consequences.

A choice may be justified without becoming painless.

A remedy may be necessary without restoring every good that the harmful arrangement had sustained.

And the defeat of domination may require the relinquishment of powers that were not themselves exercised for domination.

The Office therefore rejects the proposition that liberation necessarily consists in returning the world to the precise condition it occupied before the danger arose.

Such a return may be impossible.

The world changes.

Those who survive are changed.

The structures through which life was previously sustained may no longer remain available.

The Office considers the task of restoration distinct from the task of destruction.

The latter may end a threat.

The former asks how life may continue afterward.

XX. On the Burden That Remained

The Office returns, finally, to the Ringbearer.

Frodo survived.

The Ring was destroyed.

Sauron's dominion was broken.

Middle-earth entered a new age.

These developments were extraordinary.

They were not sufficient to restore Frodo to the life he had known before undertaking the mission.

The Office considers this fact essential to any complete assessment of the proceedings.

A person may contribute decisively to the preservation of a community and nevertheless find that the community's recovery does not include the restoration of his own former life.

The public outcome may be favorable.

The private consequences may remain painful.

The Office therefore distinguishes between the achievement of a collective objective and the recovery of an individual participant.

These matters may be related.

They are not interchangeable.

The fact that a world has been saved does not establish that every person who helped save it has been made whole.

The Office recognizes that Frodo received love, honor, friendship, and opportunities for peace.

It does not dismiss these gifts.

Nor does it regard them as substitutes for acknowledging the persistence of his injuries.

The Office further recognizes the significance of his eventual departure from Middle-earth.

It does not propose to reduce that departure to an ordinary administrative transfer, a medical discharge, or a reward for completed service.

The circumstances belong to a history whose spiritual dimensions exceed the Office's procedural categories.

The Office can, however, recognize the ethical distinction that the departure illustrates.

The needs of a person who has suffered may remain even when the danger that caused the suffering has ended.

The successful completion of an assignment does not extinguish every responsibility toward the person who performed it.

And gratitude, however sincerely offered, does not by itself restore what has been lost.

The Office therefore enters no finding that Frodo's suffering was justified merely because the mission succeeded.

It recognizes the necessity of the undertaking.

It recognizes the courage with which it was pursued.

It recognizes the consequences that followed.

And it declines to convert those consequences into evidence that the suffering was owed.

A person may give something extraordinary without having been born to give it.

The Office considers this distinction worthy of preservation.

XXI. Preliminary Findings

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

First. The making of the Rings of Power involved purposes that must be distinguished among their makers. The aspirations of the Elven-smiths were not identical to the governing ambitions of Sauron.

Second. The presentation of assistance or knowledge as a gift does not establish informed consent to undisclosed conditions attached to its use.

Third. The One Ring was designed to establish concealed authority over the other Rings and their bearers.

Fourth. Participation in a shared system does not constitute consent to an undisclosed mechanism of domination.

Fifth. The Three Rings occupied a distinct position within the system, and the necessity of the One Ring's destruction did not eliminate the significance of the losses that destruction entailed.

Sixth. The effects of the Seven and the Nine differed materially. Their bearers should not be treated as though they experienced identical forms of influence or subordination.

Seventh. The promise of increased power or prolonged life does not establish consent to the extinguishing of independent will.

Eighth. The One Ring's capacity to tempt potential opponents did not render it a morally neutral instrument.

Ninth. The replacement of an illegitimate ruler does not necessarily constitute liberation where the replacement preserves the mechanisms of domination.

Tenth. The refusal of extraordinary power may constitute an affirmative exercise of judgment and responsibility.

Eleventh. The responsibilities of a custodian must be evaluated in relation to knowledge, intention, available alternatives, and the influence exerted by the object in custody.

Twelfth. The legitimacy of a grievance does not establish the legitimacy of every object or remedy claimed in satisfaction of that grievance.

Thirteenth. The ordinary appearance or immediate usefulness of an object does not establish the absence of concealed risks.

Fourteenth. The voluntary acceptance of a dangerous undertaking does not eliminate the responsibility to recognize the limitations and welfare of the person undertaking it.

Fifteenth. A person's endurance may be extraordinary without being inexhaustible.

Sixteenth. The ethical significance of Samwise Gamgee's service cannot be reduced to his brief possession of the Ring. Ordinary acts of care, labor, and loyalty were essential to the mission.

Seventeenth. Sméagol's responsibility for wrongdoing does not eliminate the relevance of the harm inflicted upon him through his prolonged relationship with the Ring.

Eighteenth. Frodo Baggins's inability to relinquish the Ring at the Sammath Naur must be evaluated in light of the extraordinary circumstances and burdens under which that inability arose.

Nineteenth. Compassion does not require proof that the person receiving it will subsequently become useful.

Twentieth. The destruction of an instrument of domination may be necessary without restoring every good or reversing every injury associated with its history.

Twenty-first. The achievement of a collective objective does not establish that the individuals whose sacrifices made it possible have been restored to their former condition.

Twenty-second. The successful prevention of domination must be distinguished from the mere transfer of dominating power to another possessor.

These findings are preliminary.

They do not constitute a legal judgment enforceable within the political or metaphysical order of Arda.

The Office claims no authority to compel testimony from the surviving bearers of the Rings or the Powers responsible for their making.

Its findings concern the ethical questions raised by the surviving record.

Further proceedings remain possible.

XXII. On the Power That Could Not Be Made Good

The Office considers it appropriate to conclude by returning to the central difficulty presented by the One Ring.

Its power was extraordinary.

Its purposes were not obscure to its maker.

It was created to establish dominion.

Yet its danger did not consist solely in the malice of Sauron.

The Ring was capable of tempting persons whose purposes were not malicious.

It could appeal to courage.

To responsibility.

To the desire to protect.

To the fear of loss.

To the conviction that a terrible danger required an extraordinary remedy.

It could offer power to those who believed power was necessary for the good they hoped to accomplish.

And in this way, the Ring threatened to transform the very resistance to domination into another occasion for domination.

The Office considers this danger especially important.

Evil does not always require a person to cease desiring good.

It may instead persuade that person that goodness requires the unlimited exercise of power.

A guardian may wish to protect.

An adviser may wish to guide.

A ruler may wish to preserve order.

A craftsperson may wish to make the world more beautiful.

These desires may be legitimate.

But the Ring offered a means through which the desires of one person might become commands imposed upon everyone else.

The danger was not simply that its bearer might become cruel.

It was that the bearer might come to believe cruelty necessary.

That freedom must be suspended in order to preserve freedom.

That dissent must be eliminated in order to protect peace.

That the world must be compelled to accept the arrangement that would finally make it safe.

The Office rejects this reasoning.

A world protected from domination through the permanent domination of its inhabitants has not necessarily been saved from the danger it was meant to escape.

The Ring therefore presented a problem that could not be resolved merely by selecting a better master.

Its purpose was to master.

Its power was bound to that purpose.

To use it successfully would not necessarily defeat the principle upon which Sauron's authority depended.

It might instead preserve that principle under another name.

The Office therefore recognizes the significance of the decision to destroy the Ring rather than claim it.

The decision did not promise an easy victory.

It did not guarantee the survival of those entrusted with carrying it out.

It did not eliminate the need for courage, cooperation, or sacrifice.

And it did not preserve every power that might otherwise have been used for good.

It required the relinquishment of something immensely desirable.

The possibility of commanding events.

The possibility of overcoming resistance.

The possibility of arranging the world according to one's own conception of what it ought to become.

The Office recognizes that this relinquishment was difficult precisely because the danger it was intended to prevent was real.

Sauron was not imaginary.

The suffering of Middle-earth was not imaginary.

The need to act was genuine.

But the presence of a genuine danger did not render the One Ring a legitimate remedy.

The world could not be made free by making it obey.

This is the distinction the Office considers fundamental.

And it is a distinction that the history of the Ring repeatedly tests.

Saruman believed himself capable of using power wisely.

Galadriel recognized the danger that such power would present even in her own hands.

Gandalf refused an instrument through which his desire to do good might become a means of terrible authority.

Bilbo relinquished something he had come to love.

Samwise resisted the temptation to turn his desire for a beautiful world into a command imposed upon it.

Frodo carried the instrument toward its destruction, even as its influence increasingly threatened his capacity to continue.

Sméagol, whose life had been consumed by possession, remained bound to the Ring until the end.

And Sauron, who had made the Ring to ensure his domination, failed to comprehend that his enemies might seek its destruction rather than its use.

The Office recognizes that these histories cannot be reduced to one simple lesson.

Their circumstances differed.

Their choices differed.

Their capacities differed.

So did the consequences.

Nevertheless, a common question runs through them.

What does a person do when offered the power to make the world conform to his will?

Some accept.

Some refuse.

Some struggle.

Some surrender.

Some believe they have mastered the power, only to discover that their own desires have become the means through which it masters them.

And some, confronted with the possibility of exercising extraordinary authority, recognize that the freedom of others must remain more important than their own certainty.

The Office does not suggest that refusal is always easy.

It does not suggest that relinquishment eliminates suffering.

The destruction of the Ring did not restore every life.

It did not reverse every injury.

It did not allow every survivor to return unchanged to the places they had loved.

The ending of domination was not the ending of grief.

And the world that remained was not identical to the world that had existed before.

The Office considers this especially important.

A necessary act may involve loss.

A justified decision may carry sorrow.

A victory may preserve life without making every life whole.

These circumstances do not render the victory meaningless.

They require a more careful understanding of what the victory accomplished.

The Ring was destroyed.

The power through which Sauron sought to govern the wills of others was broken.

The peoples of Middle-earth were left to continue their lives without the permanent dominion he had intended.

This did not ensure that they would always choose wisely.

It did not eliminate war, grief, ambition, or the possibility of future injustice.

It did not make freedom safe from every danger.

It preserved the possibility of freedom.

And perhaps that is the distinction upon which the entire undertaking depended.

The objective was not to establish a world in which no person could ever make a harmful choice.

It was to prevent one being from acquiring the power to make every consequential choice on behalf of everyone else.

The Office therefore enters its concluding determination:

The One Ring could not be made good merely by placing it in good hands, because the authority it promised was the authority to take the freedom of others out of their hands.

The danger was not only what its bearer might choose to do.

It was what its bearer would become entitled to prevent everyone else from choosing.

The Office recognizes that the rejection of such authority required extraordinary courage.

It also recognizes that the courage was not distributed equally.

Some fought.

Some advised.

Some protected.

Some carried.

Some endured.

Some were wounded beyond the possibility of returning to their former lives.

And some performed acts of kindness whose consequences they could neither predict nor control.

The world was not preserved through the perfect execution of a single will.

It was preserved through the imperfect, difficult, and sometimes tragic actions of many persons whose judgments and purposes were not identical.

The Office considers this a fitting answer to an instrument designed to place all wills beneath one.

The Ring was made to bind the world to a single purpose.

Its destruction depended upon a world that had not ceased to contain purposes of its own.

The Office considers this distinction sufficient grounds for the present findings.

XXIII. Notice of Continuing Proceedings

The Office directs that the findings entered herein be preserved within the Maiar Accountability Record.

The present inquiry into the Rings of Power is concluded for purposes of preliminary review.

Questions concerning the responsibilities of their makers, the vulnerability of their recipients, and the continuing consequences of their destruction remain open.

The Office further directs that its Ringbearer Protection proceedings be cross-referenced with the present findings.

The earlier inquiry concerned the protection and welfare of Frodo Baggins.

The present inquiry concerns the instrument he was asked to destroy.

The Office considers these questions related but not interchangeable.

The necessity of destroying a dangerous instrument does not eliminate the obligation to protect the person entrusted with its destruction.

The Office further directs that the following inquiry be placed upon the schedule:

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

Particular attention will be directed toward the transformation of the Nine Ringbearers, the distinction between voluntary ambition and imposed subordination, and the ethical consequences of treating persons whose wills have been compromised as though they had never possessed wills of their own.

The Office recognizes that obtaining direct testimony may present difficulties.

The former bearers are no longer available.

The Office will not attempt to reconstruct their individual intentions through unsupported speculation.

The historical record will be examined according to its limitations.

The inquiry continues.

SUPPLEMENTAL ADMINISTRATIVE NOTICE

Concerning the Chain of Custody of the One Ring

The Office has completed a preliminary review of the custody and transfer of the One Ring.

The review identifies substantial irregularities.

The object passed through multiple custodians over an extended period.

Several transfers occurred without written authorization.

At least one acquisition involved circumstances that would ordinarily raise serious questions concerning ownership.

The object remained unaccounted for during a substantial interval.

Its eventual destruction was not accompanied by a conventional certificate of disposal.

The Office acknowledges that the Ring was destroyed in the fires of Mount Doom.

It further acknowledges that eyewitness testimony and the subsequent collapse of Sauron's power provide substantial evidence supporting that conclusion.

Nevertheless, the Records Division requests clarification concerning the final disposition of the object.

The Director has advised that no recoverable remains exist.

The Records Division considers this explanation plausible.

It has requested confirmation that no future attempt will be made to recover the object.

The Director has indicated that recovery would be impossible.

The Records Division has asked whether impossibility is supported by a technical assessment.

The Director has referred the matter to the Department of Information Security.

The Department of Information Security has declined to undertake an inspection of Mount Doom.

The Department considers the destruction sufficiently verified.

No further recovery efforts are recommended.

INTERNAL FINANCE MEMORANDUM

TO: Director, Office of Improbable Jurisdiction
FROM: Office of Finance and Appropriations
RE: Asset Valuation and Disposal — The One Ring

The Finance Division acknowledges receipt of documentation concerning the destruction of an artifact identified as the One Ring.

The object was described as possessing extraordinary value.

No original acquisition price has been established.

No reliable market valuation has been produced.

The Finance Division recognizes that the object was unique.

It nevertheless observes that uniqueness does not, by itself, constitute a basis for assigning an unlimited financial value.

The Division further notes that the object's destruction appears to have resulted in the permanent loss of substantial power previously invested by its maker.

This raises questions concerning whether the object should be classified as an independent asset or as an inseparable component of its maker's capital structure.

The Division has requested clarification.

The Director has indicated that Sauron placed a substantial portion of his native power into the Ring.

The Division acknowledges this explanation.

It nevertheless requires supporting documentation establishing the value of the original contribution.

The Director has advised that no such documentation survives.

The Division has therefore suspended final valuation.

The Director has additionally requested that the destruction of the object be classified as a necessary public-safety expenditure.

The Division does not dispute the necessity of destruction.

It does, however, observe that **necessary destruction does not automatically establish the eligibility of an asset for reimbursement.**

The Division further requests clarification concerning whether the Ring was publicly owned, privately held, unlawfully acquired, or retained under an extraordinary custodial arrangement.

The Director has advised that the object's history makes ordinary ownership categories difficult to apply.

The Division considers this response insufficiently specific.

Further review is required.

SUPPLEMENTAL NOTICE CONCERNING REIMBURSEMENT

The Office has received a request concerning expenses incurred during the transportation of the One Ring from Rivendell to Mount Doom.

The request identifies the following general categories:

Travel.

Provisions.

Equipment.

Clothing.

Medical care.

Security.

Emergency assistance.

And the labor of persons whose contributions were necessary to the completion of the mission.

The Office acknowledges the legitimacy of examining these expenses.

The Finance Division has requested itemized receipts.

The Director has advised that the undertaking involved considerable travel through hostile territory.

The Finance Division recognizes that ordinary documentation may not have been practicable under such conditions.

It nevertheless requests clarification concerning meals and lodging.

The Director has identified the consumption of lembas bread.

The Division acknowledges this response.

It has requested the unit cost.

The Director has advised that the bread was provided by the Elves.

The Division has requested clarification concerning whether the provisions constituted a gift, an in-kind contribution, or a reimbursable expense.

The Director has declined to speculate.

The Division has additionally requested clarification concerning transportation expenditures.

The Director has advised that much of the journey was completed on foot.

The Division considers this relevant.

It has requested mileage records.

The Director has indicated that no reliable odometer readings are available.

The Division has therefore placed the mileage claim under review.

FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM

Concerning the Classification of Samwise Gamgee

The Finance Division has requested clarification concerning the appropriate classification of Samwise Gamgee for purposes of evaluating compensation and reimbursement.

The available record identifies his activities as including:

Personal attendant.

Cook.

Security assistant.

Equipment carrier.

Emergency first responder.

Expedition support.

Temporary Ring custodian.

And, during the final ascent of Mount Doom, direct physical transportation of the principal mission participant.

The Division has requested clarification concerning whether these activities were undertaken under a single employment classification.

The Director has advised that Samwise was acting principally out of loyalty and friendship.

The Division acknowledges the importance of those motivations.

It nevertheless observes that **friendship does not constitute an exemption from occupational safety considerations.**

The Office's earlier recommendation concerning hazard pay remains on record.

The Division has requested confirmation of the applicable pay grade.

No response has been received.

The Division has therefore established a provisional classification:

EXTRAORDINARY SERVICES — CLASSIFICATION PENDING.

The Director has asked whether the classification may simply be entered as *Hero*.

The Division has declined.

Hero is not an approved payroll category.

The Director has requested reconsideration.

The matter remains under review.

END OF CONTINUING INVESTIGATION IV

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

The Office finds that the One Ring was designed as an instrument of domination and that its destruction cannot be understood solely as the removal of a powerful object.

The inquiry recognizes the independent purposes, vulnerabilities, sacrifices, and continuing losses of those affected by its existence.

No adverse finding is entered against Frodo Baggins.

The Office reiterates its recommendation concerning the recognition of Samwise Gamgee's extraordinary service.

The Finance Division has requested additional documentation.

The inquiry continues.

Literary and Interpretive Note

This fictional inquiry draws upon J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, including the history and destruction of the One Ring, the experiences of its bearers, the events of the Council of Elrond, and the consequences of the Ring's destruction.

It also draws upon the accounts of the Rings of Power in *The Silmarillion*, *Unfinished Tales*, and related writings.

The administrative procedures, findings, and recommendations of the Office of Improbable Jurisdiction are fictional interpretive devices.

The inquiry distinguishes between Tolkien's narrative history and the ethical questions raised by that history.

In particular, it examines the difference between the desire to preserve and the desire to possess; the distinction between consent and concealed control; the vulnerability of persons exposed to instruments of domination; and the consequences of assigning extraordinary burdens to individuals whose capacities remain finite.

The treatment of Frodo Baggins does not deny his final claim of the Ring. It places that act within the extraordinary circumstances of the undertaking and distinguishes the limits of endurance from a general judgment concerning the worth of the person who endured.

The inquiry likewise treats the survival and final actions of Sméagol as matters of narrative and ethical significance without suggesting that compassion is justified only when it produces a favorable outcome.

The Office's concern is not merely that the Ring possessed extraordinary power.

It is that the Ring was designed to make the freedom of others subordinate to the will of whoever mastered it.

Its destruction therefore presents a question extending beyond the defeat of its maker:

Whether a world can be protected without being possessed.