



The Lord of the Rings: Book Five

TEA WITH TOLKIEN BOOK CLUB CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Lord of the Rings: Book V Summary

Book Five of *The Lord of the Rings* begins as Gandalf rides to Minas Tirith with Pippin. Once there, they journey with haste to Denethor, Steward of Gondor. After recounting Boromir's death to him, Pippin pledges himself to Denethor's service and becomes acquainted with the City. Slowly, Minas Tirith prepares for battle with the forces of Mordor.

Meanwhile, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli are met by a company of Rangers, and together they travel to the Paths of the Dead. Théoden's men prepare to ride to the aid of Gondor in battle. Despite their desire to fight, Merry and Éowyn are charged with remaining at Edoras. However, Éowyn disguises herself as Dernhelm and rides on, with Merry, toward Minas Tirith and war.

In Minas Tirith, an overwhelming darkness lingers over the city as it is under siege by Sauron's armies. After returning from battle mortally wounded, Faramir is carried into the tombs at the order of Denethor, who has fallen into madness. In the midst of battle, Denethor attempts to burn himself and Faramir alive. Although Gandalf is able to rescue Faramir, Denethor succeeds in ending his own life. The battle rages on, and all hope seems lost, until the cock's crow welcomes morning and the arrival of the Riders of Rohan.

At the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, Éowyn stands between the Nazgûl King and Théoden, defending his life. With the help of Merry, she defeats him, though badly wounded. Soon, Aragorn arrives from the Paths of the Dead, followed by an army of the dead. At this, the battle turns in their favor and though they have lost a great number of their own, they are victorious.

After the battle, the wounded are taken into the Houses of Healing. There, Faramir, Éowyn, and Merry are healed by Aragorn. Gandalf advises the captains to march upon the gates of Mordor in order to give the Ring-bearer one last chance. And so they prepare for a hopeless battle, gathering what armies remain and marching to Mordor.

At the Black Gate, they are met by the Mouth of Sauron, who comes bearing three tokens: Samwise's sword, an elven cloak, and Frodo's mithril coat. Claiming to hold a hobbit as a prisoner, Sauron demands victory and dominion over Gondor and its allies. However, Gandalf rejects the terms and the battle is begun.

As Pippin is crushed by a troll, he hears voices crying: "The Eagles are coming!"

Book Five, Chapter One: Minas Tirith

After several days' journey, Gandalf and Pippin arrive at Minas Tirith. Gandalf speaks with authority to the men of Gondor, who refer to him as Mithrandir, and he journeys at once to see Denethor, Steward of Gondor. They come to him as he holds in his lap a great horn cloven in two: the horn of Boromir.

Pippin recounts the death of Boromir, pledging his service to Denethor as a gesture of repayment for the loss of his son. After he is sent forth from the hall, he is accompanied by Beregond, a soldier of Gondor. Pippin eats with him and learns much from Beregond, who then advises Pippin to seek out his son Bergil as a companion.

Bergil and Pippin become fast friends as they explore the city. They venture past the Great Gate where they see that many men have come to the aid of Gondor, although they are fewer than they had hoped for.

As evening comes, Pippin returns to the guest house where he waits uneasily for Gandalf. He awakes in the middle of the night to see Gandalf has returned but is very distraught, wondering aloud why Faramir has not yet returned to Minas Tirith. Gandalf encourages Pippin to rest, as he will be returned to Lord Denethor in the morning. However, he remarks that there will be no sunrise, "the darkness has begun. There will be no dawn."



Chapter Two: The Passing of the Grey Company

Aragorn, Legolas, Gimli, and Merry remain with Théoden after Gandalf and Pippin's flight to Minas Tirith. They prepare to depart and ride swiftly through the night, though they are soon surprised to be met by Halbarad Dúnadan, Ranger of the North, and a company of Rangers.

At this, Aragorn is filled with joy; for thirty of his kinsmen have come to his aid! They have brought a gift from the Lady of Rivendell, along with a message, "The days now are short. Either our hope cometh, or all hope's end. Therefore I send what I have made for thee." A message also has come from Elrond, urging Aragorn to use the Paths of the Dead.

Despite the protests of those around him, Aragorn knows it is his doom to pursue the Paths of the Dead. Legolas, Gimli, and the company of Rangers pledge to ride with him. On their way, they pass through Edoras where they are greeted and cared for by Éowyn.

Éowyn is distraught at Aragorn's decision to take the Paths of the Dead, and wishes desperately to ride along beside him rather than be left behind. However, he commands her to stay with her people and rides on with haste toward the Hill of Erech. They pass through the door, utterly terrified, but led on by the strength of Aragorn's will. Soon they realize the dead are following them, and Aragorn calls upon them to fulfill their oath. As they continue walking through the darkness, the dead continue to follow them.



Chapter Three: The Muster of Rohan

Théoden, the Riders of Rohan, and a very displaced-feeling Merry, journey for nearly three days to the Hold of Dunharrow. Théoden comes to his camp, where he is troubled to find Éowyn so distraught over Aragorn's departure. Éomer reflects, "none now in the land of the living can tell his purpose."

Shortly after, Hirgon, an errand runner of Gondor, arrives seeking Théoden and carrying a Red Arrow—their signal for aid. Théoden commits himself and his Riders to the aid of Gondor, and they prepare to ride into battle. However, they are discouraged by an unnatural darkness that has come over the land.

"The very air seemed brown, and all things about were black and grey and shadowless; there was a great stillness... Overhead there hung a heavy roof, somber and featureless, and light seemed rather to be failing than growing.... 'It comes from Mordor, lord,' he said. 'It began last night at sunset... War has already begun.'"

Preparing for war, Théoden attempts to ride on without Merry. However, at his request he allows him to continue with them to Edoras but not into battle. At Edoras, Théoden again tries to leave Merry behind, but a rider named Dernhelm agrees to secretly bear Merry on their horse. Together, the Riders of Rohan pass through still grey shadow towards Minas Tirith and war.



Chapter Four: The Siege of Gondor

Pippin awakes to the stifling darkness of morning, summoned to return to Denethor's presence. He is then sent to the armory to receive his gear. Clad in the black and silver of Minas Tirith, he is uncomfortable and filled with gloom. As he joins Beregon for the evening meal, Pippin finds some comfort in food and friendship, but their minds soon return to war when a piercing cry of the Nazgûl is heard outside the wall.

Five winged Nazgûl pursue Faramir and a few of his men as they desperately ride toward the gate of Minas Tirith. Watching from over the wall, Pippin watches as Gandalf rides to Faramir's aid and, at his coming with such great power, the Nazgûl flee.

As Faramir enters the city, he is surprised to see a halfling, revealing to his father and Gandalf that this is "not the first halfling that I have seen walking out of northern legends into the Southlands." He recounts his meeting with Frodo and Sam, and Gandalf is greatly troubled to hear that they took the path of Cirith Ungol.

Denethor speaks harshly to Faramir regarding his account, wishing for Boromir alive in his place. He calls their plan "a fool's hope", advising instead that he should have brought the Ring to Minas Tirith where he believes he could have hidden it. Gandalf and Denethor argue intensely, and at last Denethor bids all to rest before the battle comes upon them.

Gandalf and Pippin return to their lodging, where Pippin asks Gandalf about the news they'd heard. "Is there any hope? For Frodo, I mean; or at least mostly for Frodo. 'Gandalf put his hand on Pippin's head. 'There never was much hope,' he answered. 'Just a fool's hope, as I have been told...'"

He then asks about Gollum, puzzled as to why they would be following him. Gandalf replies, "I cannot answer that now... Yet my heart guessed that Frodo and Gollum would meet before the end. For good, or for evil... Let us remember that a traitor may betray himself and do good that he does not intend. It can be so, sometimes."



Chapter Four: The Siege of Gondor, cont.

In the early morning, Faramir is sent to the defense of Osgiliath. Before his departure, Faramir asks his father, "But if I should return, think better of me!" To which Denethor replies cruelly, "That depends on the manner of your return."

Throughout the rest of the day, the men of Gondor wonder if the Riders of Rohan will come to their aid. The next day, Gandalf hears news that Osgiliath is besieged and rides quickly to their aid.

Gandalf returns to Denethor with news that Faramir is alive but "pitted against a foe to great." As Osgiliath is overtaken by the Enemy, Gondor's soldiers march out to aid Faramir and his men in their retreat. Gandalf rides out with them, striking fear once again into the Nazgûl, and the men of Gondor retreat together back to the Gate.

Prince Imrahil carries Faramir into the city as he had been found wounded on the field. At this, the City falls into great despair. They have heard no news from Rohan, their Captain lays dying, their city is surrounded by their Enemy, and the war has begun. The Nazgûl encircle the City, filling the hearts of men with terror and hopelessness. "For yet another weapon, swifter than hunger, the Lord of the Dark Tower had: dread and despair."

In the White Tower, Denethor cries beside Faramir as he lay dying. After he refuses to come down, Gandalf assumes command of the last defense of the City. But Minas Tirith is burning, and nearly all have fallen into despair. As Denethor grows in his madness, he plans to burn himself and Faramir alive. He releases Pippin from his service, and Pippin frantically searches for Gandalf.

The enemy breaks down the Gate with a great ram called Grond and the Black Captain flies in, causing everyone but Gandalf to flee. Gandalf faces the King of the Nazgûl, saying, "You cannot enter here." As the Nazgûl King draws closer to Gandalf, a cock crows, welcoming morning. And with that, "Great horns of the North wildly blowing. Rohan had come at last."



Chapter Five: The Ride of the Rohirrim

For four days, Merry has ridden with Dernhelm into the deepening gloom. They are now less than a day's ride from Minas Tirith and war. Merry cautiously overhears the conversation between Éomer and one of the Wild Men. Troubled by the darkness, they have come to the aid of Théoden. He also speaks of a coming wind that brings hope, yet it cannot yet be seen or felt.

As they ride into battle, Théoden encourages his men, urging them: "Now is the hour come, Riders of the Mark, sons of Eorl! Foes and fire are before you, and your homes far behind. Yet, though you fight upon an alien field, the glory that you reap there shall be your own for ever. Oaths you have taken: now fulfill them all, to lord and land and league of friendship...Forth now, and fear no darkness!"

They arrive and fear they have come too late, but at last feel the wind and see the clouds rolling away. Again, Théoden calls to his men: "Arise, arise, Riders of Théoden! Fell deeds awake: fire and slaughter! Spear shall be shaken, shield be splintered, a sword-day, a red day, ere the sun rises! Ride now, ride now! Ride to Gondor!"

With renewed hope and filled with the joy of battle, the Riders of Rohan come into the city as the sun rises and all the hosts of Mordor are filled with terror.



Chapter Six: The Battle of the Pelennor Fields

As the Riders of Rohan come upon Gondor, they find that the assault is being led by The King Ringwraith, The Lord of the Nazgûl. Seeing the Rohirrim, he seeks out their King, and Théoden charges to meet him. He pierces Théoden's horse with a black dart and he falls, crushing Théoden beneath him. He then comes to Théoden wielding a great black mace, but Dernhelm stands between them.

At this, the Nazgûl King is filled with a sudden doubt. Merry pierces his leg from behind, causing him to stumble, and Éowyn drives her sword between his crown and mantle. Having destroyed the Lord of the Nazgûl, Éowyn falls upon her fallen foe.

Not far from her, Théoden lies dying and Merry comes to him as he speaks his last words. Éomer sees Éowyn fallen upon the battlefield and mourns as he believes she is dead. At that, he rides towards the city, crying, "Death! Ride, ride to ruin and the world's ending!" The battle continues to rage on, looking ill in their favor.

Yet soon, Aragorn arrives from the Paths of the Dead, followed by a great army of the dead which fills the hosts of Mordor with dread. At this, the battle turns in their favor and though they have lost a great number of their own, they are victorious.



Chapter Seven: The Pyre of Denethor

Pippin runs to Gandalf, urging him to return to the Citadel, where Denethor plans to burn Faramir and himself alive. They find Beregond as he holds the door against the servants of Denethor who have brought torches for him. Gandalf recognizes Denethor's madness and uses his power to cause his sword to fly from his hands and away from him. Denethor tells them Faramir is already burning, so Gandalf pushes past him, but he is relieved to find Faramir alive and asleep.

Gandalf carries Faramir away from the pyre, as Denethor cries for him, wishing to go into death together with his son. Denethor insists there is no hope, saying, "against the Power that now arises there is no victory." Gandalf asks Denethor what he would wish for if he could have his way

He responds, "I would have things as they were in all the days of my life... But if doom denies this to me, then I will have naught: neither life diminished, nor love halved, no honor abated... But in this at least thou shalt not defy my will: to rule my own end.'

At this, Denethor clasps the Palantír in his hands and lets the flames take him. Filled with grief, they carry Faramir to the Houses of Healing. On their way, a terrible cry is heard yet it brings a sense of joy.

Gandalf looks upon the battlefield, and reflects on Denethor's use of the Palantir and his descent into madness. Gandalf goes down to the battlefield, sending Beregond to the side of Faramir in the Houses of Healing.



Chapter Eight: The Houses of Healing

Deeply wounded, Faramir, Éowyn, and Merry are brought to the Houses of Healing. In despair, Ioreth, the eldest of women who served in the house, cries out, "Alas! If he should die. Would that there were kings in Gondor, as they were once upon a time, they say! For it is said in old lore: The hands of the king are the hands of a healer."

At Gandalf's request, Aragorn comes into the Houses of Healing, although he wishes to remain Captain of the Dunedain and not yet king until Mordor has been defeated. Aragorn heals Faramir, Éowyn, and Merry with the use of the athelas plant, something long considered by the people of Gondor to be a useless herb.

Aragorn, along with the sons of Elrond, labor far into the night to heal the wounded. And many marvel at him, recognizing him as the King and healer. They named him Elftstone, because of the green stone that he wore, and so the "name which it was foretold at his birth the he should bear was chosen for him by his own people."



Chapter Nine: The Last Debate

Gimli and Legolas join Merry and Pippin, where the hobbits are eager to hear about the Paths of the Dead. While Gimli refuses to tell of such things, Legolas agrees to because he did not feel the horror of it as the others did.

As the Captains of Gondor are gathered, they debate and discern their next course of action. Gandalf counsels the Captains that Sauron is in great doubt, knowing they have found his Ring and that there are some among them with strength to wield it.

"His eye is now straining towards us, blind almost to all else that is moving. So we must keep it. Therein lies all our hope. This, then, is my counsel... But we must at all costs keep this Eye from his true peril. We cannot achieve victory by arms, but by arms we can give the Ring-bearer his only chance, frail though it be..."

Gandalf counsels the men to go to Mordor, calling out Sauron to empty his lands and meet them in battle at the Black Gate. Though small in number and weary, they gather their forces and march upon the gates of Mordor.



Chapter Ten: The Black Gate Opens

The Men of the West prepare to march upon the Black Gate to challenge Sauron, leaving Merry behind at Minas Tirith. After many days of slowly advancing toward Mordor, their dwindled army of less than six thousand soldiers comes at last to the Black Gate.

They are met at the gate by the Mouth of Sauron, who bears tokens he was given to show Gandalf. To their dismay, he pulls three items from black cloth: Samwise's sword, an elven cloak, and Frodo's mithril coat. He believes the halfling to have been a spy and tells Gandalf he has been taken as prisoner.

Gandalf asks to hear Sauron's terms, to which his servant replies that Sauron demands victory and dominion against Gondor and its allies. At this, Gandalf "cast aside his cloak and a white light shone forth like a sword in that black place.

Before his upraised hand the foul Messenger recoiled, and Gandalf coming seized and took from him the tokens: coat, cloak, and sword. 'These we will take in memory of our friend,' he cried. 'But as for your terms, we reject them utterly... Begone!' At this, the Messenger of Mordor is overcome with fear and retreats, signaling for the attack to begin.

The Men of the West are suddenly surrounded and trapped by a sea of Sauron's soldiers. At the outbreak of battle, Pippin stabs a troll and is crushed. As he lays, believing himself to be dying, he hears voices crying: "The Eagles are coming!"



