

PARTH GALEN/AMON HEN – DANGER WITHIN, DANGER WITHOUT

This text was written for the movie discussion group at www.theonering.net – hence the tone.

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, everyone. In the next three days, we'll talk about danger from within and without in the Parth Galen/Amon Hen sequence.

I must admit, I found this sequence quite hard to read, partly because the meaning seemingly is obvious. Or is it? I'm very much anticipating what you think about it.

Those of you who have the animated film at hand might want to take a look at the sequence, which is well done, I think. Although it stays closer to the book ;-). And one introductory excuse: I didn't have much time to prepare this, so everything might be a little chaotic... But here we go.

DAY 1

When the boats reach the shore, both Frodo and Boromir seem restless and disquieted. Did we miss something on the Anduin-sequence? Readers of the book know that after having left Lórien, Boromir already was drawn to the Ring – but what about movie-goers, do they get it? And why is Frodo uneasy?

Then Aragorn announces that we'll cross the lake at nightfall and approach Mordor from the North – which pushes Gimli and Legolas to open rebellion against him! Ok, it's not open rebellion, but in the following passage, we see very clearly that after Gandalf's fall, the Fellowship is without leader. Gimli's "just a simple matter" and Legolas' "we must leave now" question Aragorn's authority. And rightly so, because so far, he hasn't reached a single decision of his own: Gandalf would definitely have crossed Lórien, he would very likely have approached Mordor from the North (without delaying their journey and going to Minas Tirith). And Aragorn knows it, too, otherwise would he put off Gimli in such a harsh and unfriendly manner?

So Gimli's and Legolas' outbreak of "grass-roots democracy" shows they have no leader. And that the Fellowship is breaking. (This will change with the three hunters: here he did make a decision and is immediately being accepted again.) Or how do you read this part?

There's one thing I never quite understood about Legolas' line (to cross the lake now): Mordor orcs don't like sun – so they a) are more likely to hide during the day and b) presumably are much more dangerous at night when they feel at ease. So why wait for the night? And since this is in the book already, why didn't PJ change or omit this one sentence?

Legolas also has a quote from the book ("a shadow and a threat has been growing in my mind"). In the book, this line belonged to Aragorn – so why did PJ decide to give it to Legolas? Is it in order to further diminish Aragorn's standing for us viewers? One thing I don't understand about the quote is (also due to my obviously being no native English-speaker): why "has"? It should be plural. What different quality does this sentence get through the choice of words?

A nice touch is the camera panning over a hidden statue when Legolas says his quote. (Nope, I won't go raving over the use of statues this time ;-)

And how do the Hobbits fit in this scene? Are they pure comic relief (Pippin's face with Gimli saying "and then it gets even betterrrrr...") or do they line up with either Aragorn or "the rebels"?

As for the mise-en-scène, everyone's limited in this passage, confined by their respective backgrounds (woods, water, rocks) and the size of the frame. And the setting is a rocky shore, where the book has Parth Galen as "a fair place in the summer day of old". Imho, this creates an appropriate atmosphere of uneasiness and danger that the book lacks. What do you think?



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To sum this part up, Aragorn is very alone in the scene – it's no wonder the two "loners" (he and Frodo) line up at the end of the sequence. But we'll talk about this in the two days to come.

DAY 2

Today, we follow Frodo into the woods. It's a quiet setting, with the signs of decay everywhere: leaves, branches, fallen trees, and of course the giant head. But the atmosphere is not unfriendly, it's a little like I imagined Fangorn.

And PJ changed the setting for this scene, just as he did with Parth Galen. We're in the middle of the forest, not in an open space with a flat stone. I think this is because this way – just as in the scene before – the characters are caught in confined spaces, not really able to decide for themselves, entangled in the threads of politics. This will be resolved in the scene to come, where Aragorn and Frodo reach their decisions, and where the setting changes to a bright, open space).

What do you think? Are the characters actively deciding in this scene, or are “fate”, “chance”, or the Ring driving them?

Let's take a look at the dialogue itself. Boromir seems seems very friendly, but then he gets his sudden fit und starts pushing on Frodo – who was suspicious from the very beginning. What about you? Were you convinced by Sean Bean's performance (and the arguments the script gave him)? I for one am and I think that the dialogue was altered for the better. In the book, much of Boromir's arrogance is due to this passage, when he tells Frodo how he would drive back the armies of Mordor, armies massed around him etc. The motivation for the film-Boromir to press hard on Frodo, at first is do defend his city (a noble cause), only then the Ring takes advantage of his situation and uses it for its own purposes. But when Boromir says “why do you recoil, I'm no thief”, I really believe him.

I don't agree on what ThirdOrc¹ said yesterday, that Frodo had decided to leave when they reached the shore, already. Imho, it is in this and the next scene that he comes to a decision – seeing what evil powers the Ring has over his friends.

¹ ThirdOrcOnTheLeft is one of the forum members.

DAY 3

Well, here's the last day of the Parth Galen/Amon Hen sequence and today's part actually consists of two parts (though technically it's one scene). Again, my dayjob keeps me busy, so it's mostly up to you to analyse and comment on the sequence.

We start with Frodo climbing the watchtower of Amon Hen and hiding behind the sculpture. Again we're in "active Ring"-mode, so Frodo's movements seem somehow delayed. I wonder if the capeswirl when he sits down, and the capeswirl at the end of the whole sequence are related. Suggestions?

He then comes up and watches, horrified. Other than in the book, PJ left out the signs of war that Frodo sees in every direction he looks. I think this is mostly because the war motif is rather unimportant for FOTR. And PJ's way of handling the Eye is different, he sort of turns around the effect of wearing the Ring, with Frodo being drawn to Barad-dûr. Tolkien has the Eye being drawn to the Ring.

Although it is one of the creepier parts, it's not a hopeless scene. Despite the seemingly omnipotence of the Eye, which almost immediately is aware of Frodo (and where he is), the "all seeing eye" that "pierces cloud, shadow, earth and flesh" does not really see him at first! Maybe it's not *that* all seeing, after all... The hint of a blue sky behind Frodo (as opposed to the dark grey that dominates the scene) gives us hope, too. The sky isn't all dark, yet.

Totally horrified, Frodo he stumbles back, and while falling off the watchtower, takes off the Ring (has anyone commented on the "Frodo falling on his back"-motif?). Again, this part is quite different to the book. Tolkien lets Frodo hear two voices struggling in his head (Sauron and presumably Gandalf) – the former urging him to come to Mordor, the latter to take off the Ring. Then, for a brief moment, Frodo is fully aware of himself, free to decide for himself, and takes off the Ring. This sort of "inside view" is very hard (if not impossible) for cinema to do. So as before, PJ doesn't let the characters fully decide matters, but has them being pushed to do things. Here, Frodo is panicking, he's totally creeped and more or less in a reflex takes off the Ring. As in the forest with Boromir, this is visualized also by framing and mise-en-scène, which leave Frodo hardly enough space to breathe. PJ's way of showing us Tolkien's concept of the Ring taking away the free will of those who have it. Or what do you think?

But no, the world isn't all dark, as the following shot shows. The clearest of blue skies over a breathtaking landscape.



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I love Aragorn's foot on the stone a) because I suspect it's a reminiscence to Tolkien's flat stone that PJ left out in the Frodo/Boromir-passage before, and b) it echoes the trunk in the shot when the Uruk-hai start chasing the Fellowship. So there is an underlying danger or at least a tension in this scene. And in fact, Aragorn (although we all *know* he's a goodie) might be seen as behaving similar to Boromir. He pretends to be friendly, but the first thing he thinks of is the Ring. In quite an aggressive manner, as we can tell from the way he asks Frodo. Even if he swore to protect him (he might as well say "why do you recoil, I'm no thief"). But then, the order in which things happen is different.

Frodo acts quite the same as he did with Boromir, he understands that the Ring takes away a person's will: "you are not yourself" and "can you protect me from yourself". This question must hurt Aragorn more than Frodo knows – after all, he still holds himself personally responsible for Isildur's failure, who wasn't able to protect Middle-earth from himself.

And Aragorn gives no answer to this or to Frodo's "would you destroy it". Yes, he would have gone all the way to Mordor, but he himself doubts that he would have succeeded and destroyed it. At this point, Aragorn still is uncertain of himself, he is not yet the leader-figure he will be after this and the sequence to follow. And he almost falls to the call of the Ring.

But then he reaches his first real decision. He closes Frodo's hand around the Ring, and in the same manner that Arwen had sent himself off to find his destiny (overthrow Sauron, eradicate Isildur's failure and become king) when she gave him the pendant, he sends Frodo off. They both know that Frodo *must* go (otherwise the whole of the Fellowship would be tempted), so imho it is not about letting him go, but about sending him off. And (just to start *this* discussion over again :) I still think that Frodo has only now decided to go to Mordor straight away. Of course, the decision itself gradually developed since Lórien, but I don't see how the passage before (being seen by the Eye) and now seeing Aragorn's temptation would fit in, had he decided to go before.



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Well, that's it – this has grown longer than I thought, but again it definitely was fun (and I do understand the sequence better, now – some of it at least).