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In The Mood for Doom

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Dr. Olsen's Doom Musings

Doom, is, I think, a really important word in the Lord of the Rings. And I think that it is very profitable to think very carefully about the word doom. And to pay careful attention whenever the word doom is used. In fact, it would be a fun exercise to go through the Lord of the Rings and highlight every use of the word doom, and think about them. Look at their context, look at how the word is used. Because it is used in very different ways. This is true in the Silmarillion too. Doom is also a very important word in the Silmarillion. It's really just an important Tolkien word....

Tolkien's use of the word doom I think really points to...the way in which we can see both some kind of sense of an external fate which has predestined events and simultaneously the significance of the choices of the individual actors in these events. And the word doom in one word captures that paradox.

Because doom means two different things. It means on the one hand fate. "A doom has been placed upon somebody". There is some kind of prevailing fate that is guiding events so that an end has been doomed by some higher figure. But at the same time the word doom also means a judgment. A decision that somebody makes....So a doom is something laid upon you by some kind of external force, on the one hand. It's also something that you deem. It's a choice that you make, on the other hand.

LOTR Doom Data, FOTR

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Doom as Choice or Judgment

"...the word doom...means a judgment. A decision that somebody makes..."
Forbidden Pool

"Then I will declare my **doom**", said Faramir. 'As for you, Frodo, in so far as lies in me under higher authority, I declare you free in the realm of Gondor to the furthest of its ancient bounds; save only that neither you nor any that go with you have leave to come to this place unbidden. This **doom** shall stand for a year and a day, and then cease, unless you shall before that term come to Minas Tirith and present yourself to the Lord and Steward of the City. Then I will entreat him to confirm what I have done

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and to make it lifelong. In the meantime, whomsoever you take under your protection shall be under my protection and under the shield of Gondor. Are you answered?'

Doom as Fate

"...some kind of prevailing fate that is guiding events so that an end has been doomed by some higher figure..."

The Ring Goes South

reappeared round the bend far behind him and came labouring up the slope. 'Well', cried Legolas as he ran up, 'I have not brought the Sun. She is walking in the blue fields of the South, and a little wreath of snow on this Redhorn hillock troubles her not at all. But I have brought back a gleam of good hope for those who are **doomed** to go on feet. There is the greatest wind-drift of all just beyond the turn, and there our Strong Men were almost buried. They despaired, until I returned and told them that the drift was little wider than a wall. And on the other side the snow suddenly grows less, while further down it is no more than a white coverlet to cool a hobbit's toes.'

Doom as Fate and Choice?

"...both some kind of sense of an external fate which has predestined events and simultaneously the significance of the choices of the individual actors in these events...."

Battle of the Pelennor Fields

Thus came Aragorn son of Arathorn, Elessar, Isildur's heir, out of the Paths of the Dead, borne upon a wind from the Sea to the kingdom of Gondor; and the mirth of the Rohirrim was a torrent of laughter and a flashing of swords, and the joy and wonder of the City was a music of trumpets and a ringing of bells. But the hosts of Mordor were seized with bewilderment, and a great wizardry it seemed to them that their own ships should be filled with their foes; and a black dread fell on them, knowing that the tides of fate had turned against them and their **doom** was at hand.

Doom as Fate and Choice?

Treebeard

*To Isengard! Though Isengard be ringed and barred with doors of stone;
Though Isengard be strong and hard, as cold as stone and bare as bone,
We go, we go, we go to war, to hew the stone and break the door;
For bole and bough are burning now, the furnace roars - we go to war!
To land of gloom with tramp of **doom**, with roll of drum, we come, we come;
To Isengard with **doom** we come!
With **doom** we come, with **doom** we come!*

'Of course, it is likely enough, my friends', he said slowly, 'likely enough that we are going to our **doom**: the last march of the Ents. But if we stayed at home and did nothing, **doom** would find us anyway, sooner or later. That thought has long been growing in our hearts; and that is why we are marching now. It was not a hasty resolve. Now at least the last march of the Ents may be worth a song. Aye', he sighed, 'we may help the other peoples before we pass away. Still, I should have liked to see the songs come true about the Entwives. I should dearly have liked to see Fimbrelthil again. But there, my friends, songs like trees bear fruit only in their own time and their own way: and sometimes they are withered untimely.'

Thread of Doom

Fellowship's doom, by a thread King of the Golden Hall

‘Verily’, said Gandalf, now in a loud voice, keen and clear, ‘that way lies our hope, where sits our greatest fear. **Doom** hangs still on a thread. Yet hope there is still, if we can but stand unconquered for a little while.’

The others too now turned their eyes eastward. Over the sundering leagues of land, far away they gazed to the edge of sight, and hope and fear bore their thoughts still on, beyond dark mountains to the Land of Shadow. Where now was the Ring-bearer? How thin indeed was the thread upon which **doom** still hung! It seemed to Legolas, as he strained his farseeing eyes, that he caught a glint of white: far away perchance the sun twinkled on a pinnacle of the Tower of Guard. And further still, endlessly remote and yet a present threat, there was a tiny tongue of flame.

Thread of Doom

Sauron's Doom, by a thread Mount Doom

And far away, as Frodo put on the Ring and claimed it for his own, even in Sammath Naur the very heart of his realm, the Power in Barad-dûr was shaken, and the Tower trembled from its foundations to its proud and bitter crown. The Dark Lord was suddenly aware of him, and his Eye piercing all shadows looked across the plain to the door that he had made; and the magnitude of his own folly was revealed to him in a blinding flash, and all the devices of his enemies were at last laid bare. Then his wrath blazed in consuming flame, but his fear rose like a vast black smoke to choke him. For he knew his deadly peril and the thread upon which his **doom** now hung.

Doom and Time, Day of Doom

Mount Doom

With a gasp Frodo cast himself on the ground. Sam sat by him. To his surprise he felt tired but lighter, and his head seemed clear again. No more debates disturbed his mind. He knew all the arguments of despair and would not listen to them. His will was set, and only death would break it. He felt no longer either desire or need of sleep, but rather of watchfulness. He knew that all the hazards and perils were now drawing together to a point: the next day would be a day of *doom*, the day of final effort or disaster, the last gasp.

Doom and Time 2, Hour of Doom

Field of Cormallen

‘Stand, Men of the West! Stand and wait! This is the hour of *doom*.’
And even as he spoke the earth rocked beneath their feet. Then rising swiftly up, far above the Towers of the Black Gate, high above the mountains, a vast soaring darkness sprang into the sky, flickering with fire. The earth groaned and quaked. The Towers of the Teeth swayed, tottered, and fell down; the mighty rampart crumbled; the Black Gate was hurled in ruin; and from far away, now dim, now growing, now mounting to the clouds, there came a drumming rumble, a roar, a long echoing roll of ruinous noise.

Doom and Time 3, Moment of Doom

Steward and the King

'Lose what you have found, lord?' she answered; but she looked at him gravely and her eyes were kind. 'I know not what in these days you have found that you could lose. But come, my friend, let us not speak of it! Let us not speak at all! I stand upon some dreadful brink, and it is utterly dark in the abyss before my feet, but whether there is any light behind me I cannot tell. For I cannot turn yet. I wait for some stroke of *doom*.'

'Yes, we wait for the stroke of *doom*', said Faramir. And they said no more; and it seemed to them as they stood upon the wall that the wind died, and the light failed, and the Sun was bleared, and all sounds in the City or in the lands about were hushed: neither wind, nor voice, nor bird-call, nor rustle of leaf, nor their own breath could be heard; the very beating of their hearts was stilled. Time halted.

Doomed Questions?

