



Gandalf: One Wizard to lead them, one to find them, one to bring them and, despite the darkness, unite them.

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Middle Earth is a wonderful but strangely familiar place. The Hobbits, Elves, Men and other peoples who live in caves, forests, mountain ranges and stone cities, are all combined by Tolkien to create a fantasy world which is full of wonder, beauty and magic. However, looking past these fantastical elements, we can see that Middle Earth has many similarities to the society in which we live. The different races of Middle Earth have distinct and deep differences and often keep themselves separate from one another because of mutual distrust or dislike. Due to these divisions, only one person, one who does not belong to any particular race or people, can unite them for the coming war: Gandalf the Wizard who embodies the qualities needed to be an effective leader in our world.

As Sue Kim points out in her book *Beyond black and White: Race and Postmodernism in Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien himself declared that, “the desire to converse with other living things is one of the great allurements of fantasy” (Kim 555). Given this belief, it is no surprise that Tolkien, ‘fills his imagined worlds with a plethora of intelligent non human races and exotic ethnicities, all changing over time: Elves, Dwarves, Men, Hobbits, Ents, Trolls, Orcs, Wild Men, talking beasts and embodied spirits’ (Kim 555). This plethora, as Kim puts it, makes Gandalf an important literary tool for Tolkien because to believe that such a varied mix of people, creatures, races and ethnicities live in complete harmony would feel false and perhaps too convenient. As a result Gandalf, who belongs to none of these races or ethnicities, stands apart and is therefore, the only character who can unite them.

An important attribute of leadership Gandalf has is a genuine care and concern for others. Although some may see kindness as a weakness, or even an Achilles heel, especially for leaders during wartime, Gandalf shows that ultimately kindness towards all people earns the respect necessary to lead diverse lands to victory against a common enemy. With the possible exception



of Hobbits, who consider the Wizard a charming and eccentric old man who tells stories and entertains the children, Gandalf is thought of in the same way by most of the peoples of Middle Earth. Gandalf is respected by all and is considered impartial as he does not, and possibly more importantly is not believed to, favour one race over another.

To lead people, one must have their respect. The respect that people from different factions of Middle Earth have for Gandalf is demonstrated in several instances throughout the series. Firstly, much discussion takes place at the Council meeting in Rivendell before Gandalf is formally introduced by Elrond who states, "I call upon him last, for it is the place of honour, and in all this matter he has been the chief" (Tolkien 243). It is crucial that Elrond is the one who says this because Elrond of Rivendell is head of the Elves who most would consider the wisest of people. For him to publicly acknowledge Gandalf as a chief in this way raises his standing to that of leader in the eyes of the others. At the same meeting, an argument over an old grievance from sixty years prior threatens to erupt between the Dwarf Gloom and Legolas the Elf. When Gloom says "with a flash of his eyes" to Legolas, "You were less tender to me," Elrond knows that he cannot be the one to intervene (Tolkien 249). Even though this happens at Elrond's meeting and in his home, Elrond is an Elf and his intervening would exacerbate the situation because of his relation to Legolas, so Elrond keeps silent. It is the Wizard Gandalf who steps in with diplomacy stating, "Pray do not interrupt, my good Gloom. That was a regrettable misunderstanding, long set right. If all the grievances that stand between Elves and Dwarves are to be brought up here, we may as well abandon the Council" (Tolkien 249). Because of Gandalf's detachment from any particular group, and because he speaks from a respected position, the potential argument is instantly diffused. Gandalf doesn't dismiss Gloom's grievances or show favour to Legolas, he simply acknowledges, and quite rightly states that dwelling on past grievances is a waste of time and energy given the current threats faced by all who inhabit Middle Earth. This example shows that although the different peoples may not trust others, they do trust Gandalf, and perhaps more importantly, they respect him.

A second example of the trust the different peoples put in Gandalf is when Boromir, who, like all men, begins to lust for the One Ring and use it as a weapon against Mordor. "Let the Ring be your weapon... Take it and go forth to victory!" Boromir proclaims to the Council. Elrond is the first to attempt to dissuade Boromir by warning that "Its strength... is too great for anyone to wield... I will not take the Ring to wield it" (Tolkien 261). Elrond's warning should be enough for Boromir to give up the idea of using the Ring as a weapon, but Gandalf is aware of how quickly men's hearts can be corrupted by its power, so Gandalf agrees publicly with Elrond. Gandalf knows the Ring is powerfully dangerous, but he also knows that Boromir needs to hear him state a warning to be convinced that using the Ring as a weapon is a bad idea. This is enough, for the time being, for Boromir to relinquish his desire to use the ring as a weapon because of how highly Gandalf and his opinions are held by all. Gandalf's wisdom, which allows him to make his proclamation that he won't take the ring, and the perception that Gandalf wouldn't say no to Boromir just so someone else can obtain the ring, leads to the agreement that the ring must be returned to Mordor to be destroyed. Gandalf's impartiality due to his not belonging to any particular group allows him to be a uniting force among the disparate groups.

Gandalf has a genuine affection for people who seem socially insignificant to most other potential leaders, in this case, for the Hobbits. While no one else pays attention to the hobbits because they lack social power and therefore are seen as somewhat irrelevant, Gandalf cares for and befriends them. When Gandalf first appears in *The Fellowship of the Ring* he is driving his cart to Bilbo's house. We are told that 'small hobbit-children ran after the cart all through Hobbiton and right up the hill' (Tolkien 24) because the children had rightly guessed that, 'it had a cargo of fireworks,' suggesting that the children know Gandalf well. However, his fame among hobbits and his reputation is such that they consider him 'just one of the main attractions of the party' (Tolkien 25) much like an old magician who entertains at children's birthdays. However, this image that the Hobbits have of Gandalf is a deliberate creation of his which allows him access to the shire and the trust of the inhabitants so that he can keep an eye on these peaceful and simple folk without inspiring awe and fear. The kindness and concern Gandalf shows towards the hobbits make him more trustworthy to everyone else because if he cares for people who can't technically give him anything significant - an army, money, power - in return, then it is most likely that his care for all is genuine. However, Gandalf doesn't show favouritism towards the Hobbits, he just knows they are the most in need of protection because they are the least aware of the threats and are the most peaceful group, therefore, they are the least prepared for conflict.

Gandalf is an exceptional leader because he bears the burden of knowledge related to the potential threats to Middle Earth and its inhabitants without causing undue stress to the populace. For instance, the playful and eccentric demeanour of the character of Gandalf the Grey he creates for the hobbits allows him to conceal the fact that, "his real business was far more difficult and dangerous" and Gandalf is clearly intent on maintaining the fact that the, "shire-folk knew nothing about it," (Tolkien 25) for their own benefit because, in his opinion, they do not need to know of the realities and dangers of the wider world. Some may judge Gandalf's secrecy as patronising, but given his other behaviour towards the hobbits, it can be seen as another example of his kindness. Yet, Gandalf's role and responsibilities are a much heavier burden and reach way beyond the borders of the Shire. The books allude to the fact that Gandalf is one of the guardians of Middle Earth, he travels around to remain aware of happenings and developments in relation to any potential threats to peace. That Gandalf moves around between all the different areas is another reason he is seen as having no closer affiliation with any one particular group. His nomad status grants him equal access to all of Middle Earth because he has no fixed home and belongs nowhere in particular.

In Bilbo's company, in the privacy of Bag End, Gandalf can relax and drop the mask of the character which he wears in public among the hobbits. Upon hearing that Bilbo intends to have his little joke at his birthday party, Gandalf ponders, 'who will laugh, I wonder?' (Tolkien 26) almost rhetorically. This is the first sign we get that Gandalf thinks deeply about all possible repercussions of any action no matter how trivial they may appear to be. This is another leadership quality embodied by Gandalf that makes him the only character who could successfully unite the free people of Middle Earth and defeat the armies of Sauron; Gandalf considers every situation from multiple perspectives and makes wise choices based on the

perceivable outcomes. He has a level of emotional intelligence and, an understanding of how others may respond to people. This allows him to make strategic decisions but also to influence and at times even manipulate others to achieve an ultimately positive outcome. For example, when Elrond is trying to decide who should fill the final two places in the Fellowship, Pippin and Merry are upset that he does not choose them. Pippin, "crie[s] in dismay, 'we don't want to be left behind. We want to go with Frodo.'" However, Elrond isn't persuaded and explains, "that is because you do not understand and cannot imagine what lies ahead" (Tolkien 269). This appears to be a wise decision, but Gandalf points out, "Neither does Frodo," unexpectedly supporting Pippin. Gandalf goes on to persuade Elrond that he believes, "it would be well to trust to their friendship than to great wisdom" at this Elrond relents and declares "the tale of nine is now filled," and Merry and Pippin join the quest. This can be seen as Tolkien implementing what he himself saw at the front during the first world war: that soldiers will fight harder for their friends than the over arching goal of the campaign.

At other times Gandalf is able to use his "character" to play tricks on the hobbits, though he sees this as protecting them. Though Bilbo finds his own vanishing trick at his party amusing but ultimately unimportant, Gandalf tells him that, 'it seem[s] necessary to give your guests something else that would seem to explain your sudden vanishment' (Tolkien 31) because Gandalf believes the magic ring is best kept secret. Gandalf seems to fear the potential fallout of such a revelation, that Bilbo owned a magic ring, to hobbits despite the fact that at this early stage it is not known that it is in fact the One Ring. Bilbo himself concedes that although his joke was ruined, 'I expect you know best, as usual,' (Tolkien 31) suggesting that Bilbo, though old, experienced and well-travelled compared to anyone in Middle Earth, not just hobbits, defers to Gandalf and trusts his opinions and decisions to be correct.

This conversation after the party also shows that Gandalf knows that he is wise and at least worth listening to because when Bilbo concedes that he knows best, Gandalf replies, 'I do-when I know anything,' (Tolkien 32), which is important because Gandalf knows that he has limits and must himself defer to others or find things out for himself. This is another important aspect of a great leader - an awareness of his own limitations and a willingness to continue learning.

Even though he is kind and knows he has limits, he does not shy away from standing firm when he knows what is in the best interests of the people who he leads and protects. For instance, when Bilbo won't leave the ring behind, Gandalf gets angry with Bilbo. In their last conversation before Bilbo leaves on his last adventure, we briefly glimpse Gandalf the warrior and commander. At the suggestion that he should leave the ring behind, Bilbo gets angry and threatens Gandalf whose, 'eyes flashed' and he then, sounding somewhat like Tony Soprano, warns Bilbo, 'It will be my turn to get angry soon,' which is presumably something Bilbo will not wish to see. To emphasise his point Gandalf tells Bilbo that if he gets angry, 'you will see Gandalf the grey uncloaked' (Tolkien 33). Although some see kindness in a leader as a weakness, Gandalf shows that when necessary, he will make sacrifices that he knows are required to save Middle Earth, even if it seems like he is being unkind, even to the point of

threatening aggression and even against Bilbo. This particular threat, however, is due to Gandalf's understanding of the bigger picture and the danger of a magic ring and its power.

The most obvious example of Gandalf's wisdom and his understanding of the bigger picture is when he sends the hobbits from Hobbiton on their own to knowing that they are being hunted by Sauron's spies. Gandalf understands that some people have to die or at least face death on this quest, for Middle Earth to survive. This is shown in several instances. Firstly, when Gandalf argues for the Merry and Pippin to be part of the Fellowship, he shows a willingness to risk their lives given his belief that they may be of help on the quest to destroy the ring. Another time he demonstrates that he keeps the ultimate goal and protection of all people in the forefront of his mind is when he learns that Frodo and Sam have been separated from everyone else. Gandalf says, Frodo "resolved to go alone to Mordor and he set out. That is all I can say" (Tolkien 114). Gandalf does not seek to rescue or directly aide Frodo and Sam because he knows the task of the larger group is more important to the future of Middle Earth. Gandalf realises that the remaining members of the Fellowship must be ready to defend Gondor from the Sauron's invasion because the conflict is what keeps Sauron occupied. Gandalf is wise and strategic enough to know that this battle will be a distraction that will give Sam and Frodo the best chance at getting to Mount Doom to destroy the Ring and ultimately win the war.

Gandalf is the only inhabitant of Middle Earth capable of uniting the different free peoples who have distanced themselves from one another over time. His is the one person whom everyone is prepared to listen to and follow. Gandalf becomes the bridge between the different ethnicities and societies of Middle Earth, a bridge upon which people can meet before moving on together. Once this bridging of worlds is complete, Gandalf's role and importance recede and he is able to end his watch as guardian of Middle Earth and cross the sea peacefully, knowing he has fulfilled his responsibilities but without ever receiving or desiring wide acclaim. Upon meeting Gandalf again in Fangorn Forest, Aragorn tells Gandalf, 'you are our captain and our banner. The Dark Lord has Nine. But we have One, mightier than they: the White Rider. He has passed through the fire and the abyss, and they shall fear him. We will go where he leads.' (Tolkien 121). This quote demonstrates the trust all people of Middle Earth have in Gandalf to be their leader and the loyalty they are willing to show to him because of his leadership abilities. Throughout the book, Gandalf proves himself to possess the leadership traits of Impartiality, experience, kindness and affection for all others, he commands respect, he is wise and thoughtful and he understands the need for sacrifice to achieve the ultimate victory for Middle Earth.

The fact that Tolkien creates Gandalf as a good leader, a commander people would willingly follow, is no accident. Anna Smol's essay "Oh. . . oh. . . Frodo!": Readings of Male Intimacy in The Lord of the Rings explains how the, 'Frodo-Sam relationship reflects an historically contingent mode of British male friendship that belongs to the First World War.' (Smol). Having served as a Second Lieutenant during the Great War at the Somme and other places along the front, Tolkien had first hand experience of the unique friendships formed by soldiers. Crucially, he also had little regard for many of his superior officers, stating in a letter to his wife, Edith, "Gentlemen are rare among the superiors, and even human beings rare indeed" as

recounted in A. N. Wilson's book, *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle Earth* (Wilson 71). This suggests that Tolkien, better than most, knew the importance of a good military leader, as well as the dangers of a bad one, so Gandalf, it could be suggested, is the leader Tolkien wished he had had.
