



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

**Hugvísindasvið**

## **Of Wit, Wisdom and Wizardry**

*Gandalf in The Lord of the Rings vs Harry Dresden of The Dresden Files*

**Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs í ensku**

**Atli Dungal Sigurðsson**

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## Abstract

Wizards and magic have throughout history played a significant role within literature. While it is obvious that wizards can produce fantastic feats of power, their primary function is not always to conjure magic. The defining characteristic of wizards is displayed through the use of intellectual gifts in order to achieve their goals. This thesis investigates such differences of intellect found between two wizards of modern literature, Gandalf from Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Harry Dresden from Butcher's *The Dresden Files*.

Using information found in Tolkien's *Unfinished Tales* as well as relevant passages from Butcher's novels, this thesis provides explanations regarding the two wizards' respective origin in order to establish how they came by their magical abilities, and moreover, investigates whether or not they can be considered fully, or at all, human.

It further explores the respective worlds in which the two wizards reside and will show that there is a significant difference in how morality is presented within their storylines. It posits that Middle-earth does not portray the prevalent moral ambiguity that is present within the Dresdenverse.

Finally, it addresses a popular culture trope known as "manpain" and establishes its relevance to the two wizards, using the pertinent characteristics of each wizard in order to analyze whether or not the characters can be said to be manpained.

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# 1 Introduction

Wizards are a common enough type of character to have featured in literature throughout the centuries, some of whom have achieved such renown that almost everyone has heard of them, perhaps most notably Merlin, Uther Pendragon's chief advisor and legendary wizard of the Arthurian court. This thesis considers two wizards in modern literature: Gandalf from Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings* and Harry Dresden from Jim Butcher's *The Dresden Files*. It addresses how they differ as wizards, with special emphasis on their moral and intellectual qualities.

The second chapter introduces the two wizards and the literature in which they feature along with relevant critical material. In the third chapter, the differences to be found in the main characteristics of the two wizards and their specific function within their respective storylines are addressed. In section 3.1, it is argued that both characters are of special descent or ethereal origin, given their ability to manipulate magic.

The difference between hero and villain is often displayed as the hero only commits acts of good and the villain acts of evil yet as section 3.2 demonstrates this is not always the case. It explores the moral ambiguities present in the respective storylines, the stark contrast between the reality in which Gandalf and Dresden must make their choices in and introduces how Butcher explains evil in *The Dresden Files*. Section 3.3 offers insight into a popular culture motif known as manpain: one that Dresden as a character fits into while Gandalf categorically does not. Section 3.4, Of Wit and Wisdom, explains the intellectual differences of the two wizards and gives examples of how they are two drastically different types of wizards, in that Gandalf serves in the role of an intellectual advisor while Dresden is a cunning planner that is able to react quickly in situations of shifting alliances and morality.

Gandalf of Middle-earth and Harry Dresden of Chicago, Illinois are so inherently different in how they use magic, what they accomplish with it and to what purpose that it seems implausible that they are the same sort of wizard. The aesthetics of power, presentation of arcane arts and the use of it within the novels are so inherently different, displayed in Tolkien's naturalist approach and careful balance as opposed to Butcher's infinitely more destructive, exploitative interpretation, that the two characters must be considered different simply by association with their respective magics and its established protocol. By far the most fascinating difference between the two is their roles in the

respective worlds which they inhabit and the morality of those worlds invented by the authors. This thesis explores whether or not the wizards can be considered to be fully, or at all, human. Moreover, it will be argued that a definitive factor of these characters is that they can use magic but this thesis also specifically addresses how magic is represented in the literature they feature in as well as the moral consequences for the respective characters regarding the choices they make.

## 2 Background

In order to establish whether or not Gandalf is to be considered human, this thesis will make use of Shippey's *The Road to Middle-earth* and Tolkien's posthumously published *Unfinished Tales* that deals directly with the origin of wizards in Middle-earth as well as giving insight to Gandalf as a character. Furthermore, this thesis will only deal with the account of Gandalf as he appears in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, e.g. it will not include Peter Jackson's interpretation and adaptation of the character in his immensely popular feature film trilogy.

There is unfortunately little or no useful critical material dealing directly with Butcher's work or Dresden as a character. Therefore it has been necessary to use only such novels that can be deemed relevant to the arguments found in this essay, with the exception of a single thesis which deals with the popular culture concept of manpain and how it correlates with Dresden as a character as well as Peterson's interview with the author.

### 2.1 Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

*The Lord of the Rings* is a best-selling epic high fantasy saga written by J.R.R. Tolkien. Written incrementally from 1937-1952 as an independent sequel to *The Hobbit* since the publishers Allen & Unwin "asked ... for another book about Hobbits", it has proven that it stands on its own merit (Massey). Interestingly, the series is often mistaken for a trilogy since there are three installments in the series yet that is not the case. The series is comprised of 6 books, evenly divided into three volumes. The epic saga about the Fellowship's journey is one of the most successful installments of fantasy to date. According to Shippey, the initial critical reception of these particular novels was far from flattering, and moreover, he argues that it is unfortunate that "[critics] should insist so perversely in making statements not about literary merit, where their opinions could rest undisprovable, but about popular appeal, where they can be shown up beyond all possibility of doubt" (1). The novels are set in Middle-earth, a realm inhabited by various races. The plot revolves around a diverse group of individuals united in their purpose of thwarting the plans of Sauron, Middle-earth's powerful manifestation of evil, and his

minions. The third-person narrative describes the Fellowship's struggle to destroy the One Ring, the item which Sauron seeks above all else to achieve dominion over the realm, a quest of epic proportions that allows readers to immerse themselves in Tolkien's vividly crafted world of magic. Regardless of the initial critical reception mentioned above, Tolkien's masterful *The Lord of the Rings* still enjoys immense popularity, and will surely continue to do so many more years to come.

## **2.2 Butcher's *The Dresden Files***

Initially a project which Jim Butcher wrote for a creative writing class, *The Dresden Files* has since evolved into a best-selling paranormal investigation series within the genre of urban fantasy. The series' origin can be credited to Butcher's "writing teacher ... giving [him] very good advice for several years and [he had] been ignoring her" (Butcher and Peterson). Since there are currently 15 novels of *The Dresden Files* with several more installments planned, it is safe to assume that Butcher should perhaps have listened to his teacher sooner. The novels incorporate classic supernatural elements, such as vampires, Faeries and werewolves, while also utilizing the more modern investigative motif. Set within an alternate depiction of Chicago, Illinois, (henceforth Dresdenverse), it is a first person narrative that allows its readers to follow criminal investigations through the eyes of Harry Dresden, the city's only practicing Wizard. The novels recount the difficulties he experiences as a practitioner of magic in modern times through a humorous narrative which eventually gains gravitas over the course of several novels as the character realizes that he has been the central cause for much of the chaos in his life and must also bear the full weight of the consequences of his own actions.



### 3 Comparing Gandalf and Dresden

Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* contains one of the most iconic wizards in modern literature, one that fights tirelessly against evil to ensure that good may triumph. Perhaps most interesting about Gandalf is not that he is a wizard but rather the very few occasions on which he does in fact cast spells. It is almost exclusively in order to foil his foes that Gandalf noticeably establishes his power although he does at times exert a calming effect in certain situations. In point of fact, Gandalf uses magic so little that it is almost as if he is reluctant to manifest magic, to such an extent that it begs the question of whether or not he really is a wizard or not. Moreover, critics of Tolkien have stated that there is a distinct lack of Gandalf evolving as a character, considering the ordeals he endures throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. As Shippey discusses, "[t]he characters, it is often alleged, are flat; there is not enough awareness of sexuality; good and evil are presented as absolutes, without a proper sense of inner conflict within individuals" (153), a valid point given that by Gandalf's own admission, he "once knew every spell in all the tongues of Elves and Men or Orcs" (Tolkien *FOTR* 399-400) yet seemingly feels no change as he assumes the mantle of being the White Wizard. Yet consider that Gandalf's change, while not immediately apparent, gradually reveals itself through his greater assertiveness and surety in how to proceed when almost all others are floundering and reacting to Sauron's offensive; Gandalf is actively working to save Middle-earth from evil but not by amassing an army in the same way as Men, Elves and Dwarfs in order to enter pitched battle with an at best uncertain outcome. Gandalf's greatest action within *The Lord of the Rings* has nothing to do with magic, it is rather that he trusts his own instincts and knowledge about Hobbits as he entrusts Frodo to carry the Ring and insists that Samwise will accompany him. Using his wisdom in this manner, trusting in others to complete the task which he sets before them, effectively negates the need for magic more often than not.

While both wizards do what they must in order to succeed in their respective quests, it must be mentioned that Gandalf's struggles to thwart the antagonists rarely involve using magic unless he is forced into a situation where he has no choice. According to Wood, this could be attributed to Tolkien's view on magic, that he "sets magic in contrast with craftsmanship. A craft requires lifelong discipline and laborious efforts,

unlike the instantaneous results of magic”; this clearly explains why Gandalf so seldomly resorts to spells in order to battle lesser minions of evil such as orcs (328). It is not that Gandalf was unable to cast the spells but rather that Tolkien wanted his wizard to be a disciplined, learned man who would only resort to magic if no other option presented itself first. In what amounts to almost the exact opposite, Dresden often finds himself in combative situations in which he utilizes all skills available to him, be it magic or more conventional weaponry in the form of a gun. This clearly displays the difference between the two worlds into which the respective wizards are written, i.e. that Gandalf is patience and wisdom incarnate while Dresden’s strengths are wit, cunning and deducing the correct reaction in most cases.

It is not enough to have a staff and a beard to be called a wizard; as the word itself would suggest, it requires a certain amount of wisdom or wit as well as having the ability to manipulate magic. Gandalf displays wisdom and foresight in what must be considered a more conventional manner, meaning that he carefully considers what options are available to him to implement in his attempt to thwart Sauron’s plans whereas Dresden displays what in modern society would be called street smarts, displayed through his intimate knowledge of his immediate vicinity and society, Chicago. This is not to say that Butcher has brought to life a thug with subpar intellect who only knows his way around the darker side of where he lives; Harry’s intellectual strength lies in his critical analysis of how dangerous situations might evolve and his exposure to criminal activities in Chicago has taught him to plan ahead for everything that might go wrong; in a sense, Gandalf and Harry are similar in this fundamental facet of wizardry, it is only that they go about it in a very different manner. Moreover, it is apparent that Gandalf effectively serves as a highly trusted advisor within *The Lord of the Rings* due to his immense knowledge of Middle-earth and its inhabitants regardless of his ability to manifest magic. There could be no such role for Dresden, whose personality renders him unable to even speak civilly to authority figures within the wizarding community unless he considers them to have earned his respect. This contrast reinforces how Gandalf and Dresden differ as wizards; if one were to insert Dresden into Middle-earth, there would be no advisory capacity for him within the fellowship with the extent of influence Gandalf displays and there would be a considerably higher amount of magic used. One could imagine that at the forming of the Fellowship in Rivendell, Dresden would be enormously out of place and attempting to cover his lack of

knowledge with humourous commentary. Conversely, the same applies to Gandalf within the Dresdenverse and the various challenges it presents to its wizards. The image of a calm, reasonable Mithrandir attempting to motivate his companions to follow him in a desperate assault on the holiest of holy places of Faerie during pitched battle is preposterous. Gandalf comes across as far too reasonable to even attempt that which he knows full well might result in his death: it would certainly have killed Dresden had it not been for the surprise assistance of a companion exerting her last ounces of energy to charge at her enemies, allowing Dresden to stop Aurora from reaching the Stone Table which he did by “pinning her down ... [when] she had no strength” due to wounds inflicted by other Faeries (Butcher *SK* 363).

While Gandalf gains the intimate knowledge required to defeat Sauron by visiting Minas Tirith’s vaunted library, and thus by extension becomes wiser for it, it does not grant him more magical prowess or new spells. As stated in *Fellowship of the Ring*, he already knows more about magic than he could forget due to his immense experience and longevity; presumably much of his time not spent battling forces of evil had been spent within libraries seeking to further his command of spells. Such is not the case with Dresden; in fact, it could be argued that the character begins with little intimate knowledge of the arcane arts beyond basic theoretic use which is sufficient to overcome his opponents yet throughout each novel, he learns to harness his power in a more refined manner as well as grasping for more power in order to overcome what are increasingly becoming stronger opponents, perhaps most notably through the influence of a spirit inhabiting his psyche, to be discussed below. The evolution of Dresden as a character from *Storm Front* to the latest novel, *Skin Game*, is immense; perhaps the only similarity between them would be his antagonistic behaviour toward authority figures and his moral compass which puts him squarely on the path of good, despite his personal tragedies and experiences.

It should perhaps be noted here that the only change in Gandalf that discernibly manifests in his behaviour throughout *The Lord of the Rings* is his battle with the Balrog on the bridge of Khazad-Dûm in *The Fellowship of the Ring* and his subsequent return as the White wizard in Fangorn forest in *The Two Towers*; it is by no means a complete change of character in which Gandalf suddenly becomes overtly ambitious or is seeking to supplement his power by nefarious means but rather that he becomes more settled in his

capacity as a trusted advisor, more at ease with the task required of him and, perhaps most importantly, more inspiring a figure to those who would heed his advice and commands.

The elements of magic to be found in the literary works of Butcher and Tolkien in question are completely different on all counts: what type of magic is used, how it is described and the frequency with which it is used are not the same for Harry as it is for Gandalf. Beyond what has been discussed above in regards to Tolkien wanting to portray this particular magic-user as a learned man first, wizard second, it is clear that Gandalf manipulates the elements of nature in order to manifest magic. His willpower, coupled with spoken or sung words at times, seems sufficient in order to allow him to manifest his spells. The clearest examples of this can be observed in Gandalf's conversation with Saruman, one of the Istari, like Gandalf, who had aligned himself with Sauron's forces, when he says " 'Come back, Saruman!' ... To the amazement of the others, Saruman turned again, and as if dragged against his will, he came slowly back... breathing hard ... his face was lined and shrunken" which clearly demonstrates that Gandalf is compelling Saruman by force of will to heed his command (Tolkien *TTT* 761). The following spell is of the exact same sort, in which he simply utters "Saruman, your staff is broken" and the staff shatters accordingly (Tolkien *TTT* 761). There seems to be little rhyme or reason to the system of magic within Tolkien's universe other than that it must not break the laws of nature itself, e.g. the natural rules of Middle-earth stipulate that neither wizard nor man would ever be able to fly or reverse time and so forth.

### **3.1 Magical By Nature**

Wizards are of special descent or origin. Merlin of the Arthurian legends, for instance, was the spawn of a demon and an unwitting, innocent woman that was unaware of what was happening according to the first chapter of *Merlin: or the Early History of King Arthur: a Prose Romance*. Although the circumstances differ with Gandalf and Dresden respectively, they can still be considered not fully human. In Dresden's case, his ability to use magic is bestowed upon him by the power of his maternal bloodline while his father was fully human. Gandalf, on the other hand, is a spirit that appears in the guise of a man, it is only his appearance that is similar to that of Middle-earth's humans.

The naturalistic elements incorporated by Tolkien in order to shape Gandalf's use of spells are intriguing in their own right since it reinforces Shippey's theory of his possible origin as a spirit (see discussion of the Maia below) and moreover would suggest

that Tolkien did not want his wizard to feature any unnatural control over the universe which he had so carefully balanced. That he is not human is evident, simply due to his staggering longevity. It is difficult to determine precisely when or from where Gandalf came other than that the Valar sent him to Middle-earth from the West, yet it is clear that his benevolent nature is intended to assist agents of good in all possible ways. The theory that Dresden is more human than Gandalf thus has merit yet it is inescapable to wonder whether he can be considered *only* human given that he is of special descent, since his bloodline is of critical importance to his being able to use the arcane arts.

### 3.1.1 Gandalf's Angelic Nature

There are a number of theories but one is mentioned far more often than others: Gandalf is a higher Power, an ethereal immortal being bound to remain on Middle-earth in order to guide champions of good to victory. One such theory, as discussed in Shippey's *The Road to Middle-earth*, is that Gandalf is in fact "a Maia, a spiritual creature in human shape sent for the relief of humanity; much later than he finished the series Tolkien indeed reportedly said 'Gandalf is an angel'" (171). One finds a more detailed description of this in *Unfinished Tales* which confirms that Gandalf is a spirit clothed in flesh for a specific purpose:

"[e]missaries they were from the Lords of the West, the Valar ... clad in the bodies as of men, real and not feigned, but subject to the fears and pains and weariness of earth ... though because of their noble spirits they did not die ... [and moreover,] emissaries were forbidden to reveal themselves in forms of majesty or to seek to rule the wills of Men or Elves by open display of power, but coming in shapes weak and humble were bidden to advise and persuade Men and Elves to good, and to seek to unite in love and understanding all those whom Sauron ... would endeavour to dominate and corrupt" (Tolkien *UT* 388)

and moreover, it clearly states why Gandalf uses so little magic and only when he needs to; he has been commanded by the Valar not to use magic unless it is directed at Sauron or his minions. The above quote also states that the primary function of the Istari, as the wizards are called, is to use their wisdom and force of persuasion to gently guide the folk of Middle-earth to good without the use of magic.

When Gandalf reveals himself to Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli in Fangorn forest in *The Two Towers* when the Fellowship believes him to have died in Moria, merely the sound of Gandalf's laughter causes Aragorn to feel "a strange cold thrill; and yet it was not fear or terror that he felt: rather it was like the sudden bite of keen air or the slap of a cold rain that wakes an uneasy sleeper" (Tolkien *TTT* 643-644). This phenomenon, that his mere presence affects those around him, occurs yet again during the battle of Minas Tirith when Gandalf assumes control of its defensive forces and "wherever he came men's hearts would lift again, and the winged shadows pass from memory", effectively soothing and calming the troops simply by being near them, inspiring them to put up a stauncher defense in order to preserve the innocent inhabitants of the city (Tolkien *ROTK* 1078). The fact that Gandalf does not utilize magic more than a handful of times throughout the storyline and obviously cares for Middle-earth's animal races, most prominently displayed in his interactions with Shadowfax and his familiarity with the Great Eagles, does suggest that Gandalf is indeed more than just a wizard; that he has a more intimate connection with, and relies on, the world and its inhabitants than is apparent at first.

If one follows the line of inquiry that Gandalf is an angel rather than a wizard, his spells suddenly become spiritual in their application; his speech on the bridge of Khazad-Dûm becomes tinged with religious implications when he reveals to be "a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor" (Tolkien *FOTR* 430). Given that Gandalf serves at the directive of the Valar with the sole task of countering the corruption of evil that is spreading throughout the realm, it really is quite remarkable that he does not use magic more often yet also shows that he adheres to the original purpose which he was meant to serve.

Gandalf's minimalistic use of magic does mean that on those few occasions, on which he does cast a spell, the event becomes memorable because it means that it is of crucial necessity that he feels compelled to manipulate the forces available to him. There is, however, one instance in which Gandalf uses magic when it seems unnecessarily forceful; when confronting Gríma Wormtongue in Théoden's court, Gandalf "raised his staff. There was a roll of thunder. The sunlight was blotted out from the windows; the whole hall had suddenly become dark as night ... Only Gandalf could be seen, standing white and tall before ... there was a flash as if lightning had cloven the roof ... [and] Wormtongue sprawled on his face", clearly a powerful distortion of natural order had

occurred through Gandalf's spell but one wonders if Gandalf could not have reasoned with Théoden first without resorting to magic in order to remove Wormtongue's presence from the conversation (Tolkien *TTT* 671). It is somewhat out of character for Gandalf, he who counsels pity for Gollum, to directly strike at what should at most be considered a petty irritant which could be circumvented by other means. Wormtongue's anger and worry over Gandalf not having been relieved of his staff is noticeable; in Bates' discussion which focuses on Middle-earth, the staff is explained to be "a potent magical implement", a foci for his power and a symbol of his status as a wizard (202). Regardless of what tools were used to create the character itself, it is clear that he can not be considered human; he is instead to be considered a spirit, closer to an idealistic depiction of virtue and wisdom, as will be discussed below.

### **3.1.2 Dresden's Bloodline**

Similar to Merlin's background, Harry Dresden's origins must be traced back to his lineage in order to explain his ability to manifest magic; it is inherited from his mother's side, a magic user who was often at odds with the White Council, the authorities of magic within Dresden's reality. There is, however, no implication that Dresden is anything but human since both parents were fully human. Since there is little information regarding the origin of wizardry or how they came to possess the power in the Dresdenverse save a few passing references to the original Merlin, who unquestionably wields mythical powers in a vision Dresden experiences in *Cold Days*, one can only speculate as to how came to originate in specific bloodlines or whence it came. There is, however, a comment from Lily, the Summer Lady of Faerie, which implies that humans have always had magic, and moreover, that those humans capable of wielding magic "reek of arrogance and deception ... even the famous Merlin [did]." (Butcher *CD* 462-463). It is explicitly stated that "[t]here were endless stories about Merlin. Popular theory among contemporary wizards was that they were more apocryphal than accurate. Hell, I'd always figured it that way, too" which suggests that humans in the Dresdenverse have always been able to manipulate magic, perhaps only at a lesser rate during Dresden's lifetime than at earlier points in history due to breeding, i.e. that breeding between magic-users and those unable to had over time affected the amount of people born of a bloodline able to use magic (Butcher *CD* 156).

It is apparent that Butcher did not create his character to be a man with the ability to manipulate magic only to then let him occupy an advisory position. Harry Dresden relishes being able to use magic, not once does he regret the fact that he is born into a lineage which would grant him special abilities nor does he ever contemplate its origin in his family or seek to understand it better. What he does lament is being an orphan and not having more people to trust. Magic is, to be blunt, the driving force of Dresden; he thrives on its power, uses it indiscriminately at times and is brash when it comes to making decisions about his powers.

### **3.2 A Moral Universe?**

It is obvious that Tolkien and Butcher present their characters with different sets of morals. In Tolkien's Middle-earth, there is little ambiguity in how good or evil is illustrated on a grand scale; the forces of good find themselves forced to act in order to foil the embodiment of evil; Sauron, and his monstrous and human allies by extension, are completely evil in contrast to those characters aligned with good. This juxtaposition of good and evil works well in Middle-earth because the lack of compromise between forces ensures that there will be a point of conclusion where either force emerges victorious. This polarized struggle suggests an element in Middle-earth that is similar to Ragnarök, the apocalypse in Norse mythology in which "the right side remains right even if it has no ultimate hope at all ... [with] no reward for virtue except ... having done what is right. Tolkien wanted his characters in *The Lord of the Rings* to live up to the same high standard" (Shippey 177). During the forming of the Fellowship in Rivendell, the history of evil is discussed in detail and a plan is set to defeat the antagonist, his armies and allies.

Given that it has been stated that Tolkien's Middle-earth does not have moral nuances to the same extent as the Dresdenverse and the shifting morality dependent upon Dresden's needs in each novel, it should be explicitly stated that just because Gandalf and Harry can use magic does not mean that they are without their character flaws that the enemy exploits when the opportunity presents itself: Gandalf's flaws are negligible, innocent eccentricities that only serve to endear him to readers, such as his irascibility, intolerance for foolishness in his company and a penchant for smoking his pipe whenever the opportunity presents itself. Dresden's critical flaw is definitely of more import, and is made known to the reader within the opening chapters of *Storm Front*; he is chronically unable to refuse women's pleas for assistance regardless of the personal danger that doing



so might place him in. Interestingly, Butcher only incorporates the damsel in distress motif only to later reveal that there was no distress, only deceptive means in which a woman is used as bait to tempt Dresden into action, a character blind spot which in Butcher's own words "is an irrational streak of chivalry that ... is going to get him killed one day" (Butcher, and Peterson). The only exception to this flaw that Harry evinces on multiple occasions would be when the women are not fully human. Harry does not hold faeries, vampires, ghouls or werewolves in the same regard as humans; an important distinction to make in order to understand his reasoning when it comes to using magic against those which strive against him and also an important distinction regarding the laws of magic, to be discussed below. If Harry knows that the person he is fighting against is of supernatural origin, he will make no distinction of gender: should he be aware that the being that he faces is not human, Dresden is free to use whatever means necessary in order to subdue or kill what he sees as a threat without breaking magical laws.

Dresden's involvement with the Denarians, a small group of malicious individuals who use magic to wreak havoc, their magic and knowledge amplified with Judas' thirty pieces of silver which contain the spirits of Fallen angels, also plays a significant part of his reticence in accepting Mab's offer. In the conclusion of *Death Masks*, Nicodemus Archleone, the Denarian leader, throws a coin toward a child, knowing Dresden would never allow the child to come to harm before himself. Harry "panicked abruptly and lunged out ahead of [the child], slapping [his] hand down over a polished silver coin ... [he] felt a prickling jolt shoot up [his] arm, and had the sudden, intangible impression that someone nearby was waking up from a nap and stretching"; this sensation describes the occasion in which a Fallen angel, Lasciel, becomes part of Dresden's psyche which she subsequently attempts to lead astray from its moral path (Butcher *DM* 372). It is important to note a crucial distinction between Harry's acceptance of the Winter mantle and the act of picking up Lasciel's coin. The difference is that the former is intentional where Dresden consciously enters into Mab's service and the latter an instinctive act in which he is protecting his friend's child from an insidiously seductive demon that eventually corrupts its host. Given that Dresden runs the risk of corruption through extrinsic influence and not just his own moral choices, it is this distinction that eventually allows Harry to rid himself of the unwanted Lasciel through a series of manipulative actions which placed himself in

lethal danger and forced the Denarian demon to affect Dresden's brain in order to ensure his survival.

Perhaps most fundamentally, Gandalf is virtuous: he commits no wrongdoing in any venture that he undertakes, there is no moral ambiguity within the character to be found. His inherent kindness and respect toward inhabitants of Middle-earth who do not cross him or endanger his mission are all testament to this, as well as his seemingly endless battle against Sauron's forces. Hunter would argue that this lack of ambiguity throughout *The Lord of the Rings* is "a strong statement about the impermanence of all human culture as human beings experience it, while its redemptive romance elements make us wish that it didn't" (138). Furthermore, he states that the "lack of clarity is much more reassuring than any specificity could be" because it allows readers to impose their own images onto evil, i.e. the disembodied Sauron, faceless Ringwraiths cloaked all in black, while being spoonfed details and descriptions of Gandalf and the Fellowship's struggle for overcoming their nemesis (Hunter 144). It is apparent that one can not find a single sinful or objectionable characteristic that diminishes Gandalf in any way; perhaps his only vice, as described in *The Lord of the Rings* is that Gandalf prefers to smoke his pipe. His actions are all of high moral caliber; he acts completely selflessly throughout the storyline and would never compromise his morals for personal gain. Although there are many actions through which Gandalf displays this to the reader, none establishes this more concretely than when he refuses to accept the Ring from Frodo even though taking it would grant him "power too great and terrible" that he could use to overcome those he considers evil (Tolkien *FOTR* 81). It is a testament to Gandalf's inherently good nature that he realizes that "the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good" but more than that, it also shows his wisdom, a trait which will be further discussed below. (Tolkien *FOTR* 81). The loyalty of the white wizard to the cause of good or to his friends can never be questioned, as with his moral compass which steers him on a straight path to confronting evil, or seeking knowledge to aid his quest. Yet, on the topic of virtue, it must be mentioned that Dresden, through sheer force of will and an adamant refusal to bend his moral perception, repulsed the shade of the Denarian demon Lasciel and convinced its manifestation to manipulate a lethal situation to Harry's favour, allowing good to triumph. Despite Dresden's long-term exposure to the demon's shade that was constantly whispering and offering him limitless power, he remained true to

his morals throughout desperate situations in which he might well have died. The implication that a human could hold such power over an ancient deceitful being is staggering in its simplicity, that if the human would only be able to resist temptation from its manifestation, they would lose their power. That Dresden is able to resist her at all is remarkable: that he is able to convince the shade of a demon to commit a noble act that saves others suggests that in this, he is just as virtuous as his Tolkienian counterpart.

There is an explicit statement regarding humanity, evil and its origins in humanity: it is a cumulative effect based on one's actions within the Dresdenverse, one in which every human being begins as an innocent and only through their own deeds can that person become evil:

No one just starts giggling and wearing black and signs up to become a villainous monster ... It happens to people. Just people. They make questionable choices, for what might be *very good reasons* [my italics]. They make choice after choice, and none of them is slaughtering roomfuls of saints, or murdering hundreds of baby seals, or rubber-room irrational. But it adds up. And then one day they look around and realize that they're so far over the line that they can't remember where it was (Butcher CD 273)

at which point readers come to realize that Dresden has reached an impasse in which his partners felt the need to verbalize and comment on that he had changed through some of the choices he made and not necessarily for the better, even though he continues to fight those he considers evil. It becomes clear that Harry needs to consider by what means he is fighting evil and how, before it leads him become that which he despises the most.

Dresden himself, in an inner monologue, states that:

[p]ower corrupts – and the people being corrupted never seem to be aware that it's happening ... what kind of arrogant ass would I be if I assumed I was morally infallible? That I would be wise and smart and savvy enough to avoid the pitfalls of power, traps that had turned better people than me into something horrible?

I didn't want her to be right. I didn't like the idea at all.

But denial is for children. I had to be a grown-up. (Butcher CD 273-4)

which shows the reader that Harry's moral compass is still more or less intact yet it requires attention every once in a while, to check one's bearings in order to know if it is

still working as it should. The power and choices that Dresden has been exposed to, especially the Denarian coin, had corrupted many before him; he is not immune to arrogance, to the lure of power or being seduced by promises made by powerful figures, just like any other human. His fallibility only serves to humanize him, to increase readers' empathy for his plight when all seems impossibly complicated and he has no readily apparent option or plan available. The realization that he has committed questionable acts that others may perceive as evil coupled with the fact that he was able to rationalize them to himself, or his companions, prior to making them is yet another example of the murkiness of what is right or wrong in the Dresdenverse.

It is only in the novel *Turn Coat* that Dresden meets an entity portrayed as being completely evil, intent only on inflicting pain and establishing dominance over those that it perceives as lesser beings. The prevalent moral ambiguity in the Dresdenverse also allows his protagonist considerable leeway when presented with moral choices and actions. There are not always good or evil choices; Dresden must act on his instincts, deliberate on the choices he makes and reflect on their moral meaning to ascertain whether or not the actions themselves are in fact of good. At a young age, Dresden became an orphan after his father had passed away and was placed in the care of Justin DuMorne to receive tutelage in all things magic. In short, DuMorne performed dark arts, attempted to gain control over Dresden's mind and when that failed, sent a demon to kill him; Dresden assumed control over the demon by undisclosed means, sent it back to kill his old master, i.e. breaking the first law of magic since he used magic to kill a human, which resulted in him being placed on the probationary Doom of Damocles, under which he was allowed to use no forbidden magic on pain of death at the hands of Wardens of the Council. Seeing how Dresden was only protecting himself, as best he knew how at a young age, one should definitely assume that his irreconcilable differences with figures of authority stems from this encounter with the White Council when it condemned him to death, only being spared at the intervention of another wizard.

The moral leeway mentioned above allows for considerable change and development within itself, e.g. Dresden changing his mind about whether or not to trust, for instance, Lara Raith during one particular novel and having to make the same choice with another decision, and outcome, in another novel. Shifting alliances are quite frequent within *The Dresden Files* while the conflict between good and evil in Middle-earth seldom

offers any such option. This luxury of morality and choosing what should be done does not exist to the same extent in Tolkien's Middle-earth; there is simply good and evil with little interchangeability, with the two constantly at odds; not that this in any way diminishes either Tolkien nor Butcher, the two simply have differences when it comes to their respective world-building. The prevalent moral ambiguity and fluidity of situational allegiances as presented throughout novels set within the Dresdenverse also provides a considerable challenge for the reader, in that it continuously forces the reader to reevaluate his or her perception of characters that are evolving alongside Dresden's character.

As a direct opposite to Gandalf and his fears of being misled from the moral path should he assume the responsibility of the ring, Dresden does eventually accept power from an outside source, in the form of the Winter mantle, in order to persevere and outlast his enemies. In doing so, Dresden binds himself as part of the Winter court of Faerie and assumes obligations as Mab's Knight and must do her bidding should she directly command it or face punishment for disobedience should he refuse. It is completely unthinkable that Gandalf would resign control over himself, or his power, to anyone or anything other than those beings that imposed the primary protective purpose on his spirit. The initial offer to assume the Winter mantle is made to Harry in *Summer Knight* in the aftermath of the battle for the Stone Table as the then current Knight had betrayed Mab and she was searching for a suitable replacement. To his credit, Dresden vehemently denies her request a number of times through the course of several novels; it is only in *Cold Days* that he feels compelled to accept Mab's position as Knight despite his fears that doing so will have grave consequences for him, or rather his humanity and empathy for others. It is also later revealed that Dresden, in a cunning and intricate plan, had arranged for himself to be assassinated by an associate in order to slip away from Mab's grasp before she could force him to commit some atrocity at her bidding. This sort of desperate solution is perhaps extreme yet when one considers that Dresden made a conscious choice to serve a powerful ruler of Faerie with whom he has firsthand experience of and knows that she tolerates no weakness or disobedience; if Dresden is anything, he is fundamentally disobedient. His lack of concern for rules and legalities, except when it comes to his magical abilities, would almost certainly get him killed eventually should he remain Winter's Knight for an extended period of time. Moreover, the Winter Court and the constant political maneuvering by those inhabiting it are dangerous enough to have lethal

consequences for anyone there. Mab's daughter, Maeve, with whom Dresden has long had differences, best describes the inner workings of court when she says: "I love violence. I love treachery. I love your pain - and the best part, the part I love most, is that I am doing it for your own good ... this is me being one of the good guys." (Butcher *CD* 250). That the Winter Lady could see treachery as helpful and good further confirms the theory that morality of the Dresdenverse does not operate according to the same principles as Middle-earth.

### **3.3 The Pained Man**

Harry Dresden fits perfectly into the trope of a manpained character: "[w]hen a main character in a story (always male, generally white) is written with a particular kind of psychologically painful history that causes him to behave in specific ways, he is often said to have manpain" (qtd in Óladóttir 11). A crucial point of the trope is that "manpain is a storytelling device that draws attention to the pain and suffering of a hero ... to the point where he becomes the only character with intrinsic value, and all experiences within the narrative come to belong to him" (Óladóttir 5). To explain how this applies to Dresden, a general oversight of the Dresdenverse and his actions within its society will be given to add context.

In the Dresdenverse, there are rules, guidelines and laws of magic which the ruling body of wizards, known as the White Council, enforce with extreme prejudice. There are a number of practitioners of magic to be found within the city yet there exists a ranking system within aforementioned ruling body that stipulates that a practitioner must be able to manipulate a certain degree of power before qualifying as a wizard. There are also several laws of magic, which have yet to be fully explained within the novels, many of which are punishable by death if broken by practitioners regardless of what status they hold within the community, under which a full wizard and an apprentice would be held accountable in the same manner for whatever the accusation might be. Moreover, it is deemed irrelevant if a practitioner is aware of these laws or not; the punishment is meted out regardless unless there are mitigating circumstances, such as when wizard McCoy is willing to stand up for Dresden when accused of murdering his mentor, Justin DuMorne, by magic, causing both of them to be placed under the Doom of Damocles; should Harry have broken his probation of that sentence, both he and wizard McCoy would have been executed by order of the White Council's enforcers. The White Council maintains a special corps of

wizards known as the Wardens in order to enforce these laws and seek out those that violate these regulations. As for the magic itself, its use is best described as practitioners being able “to tap into the fundamental energies of creation and life itself” in order to manipulate or exploit reality, to reverse or deflect the course of nature (Butcher *StF* 18).

Dresden’s morals and loyalties are infinitely more convoluted than those of Gandalf. He is frequently at the heart of disastrous events in which he must make a choice based on his own moral compass and self-preservation. If this means he must commit a deed that he considers morally repugnant or has a devastating effect on his personal or professional life, he will act and deal with eventual consequences those actions might have at a later time. In a crucial moment in *Grave Peril*, Dresden refuses to accept a vampire’s bargain out of loyalty and “for the sake of one soul. For one loved one. For one life ... [t]he way I see it, there’s nothing else worth fighting a war for” (Butcher *GP* 367). In doing so, he knowingly started a war that would claim the lives of many fellow wizards, an action which culminates in *Changes* where Dresden finds himself needing to kill her whom he had so desperately attempted to save in the first place in order to protect his only remaining family and himself from a bloodline curse. It is a defining moment for Dresden as a character when he

put Susan on the altar and said ‘She’ll be safe, I promise.’ She nodded at me, her body jerking and twisting in convulsions, forcing moans of pain from her lips. She looked terrified, but she nodded. I put my left hand over her eyes. I pressed my mouth to hers, swiftly, gently, tasting the blood, and her tears, and mine. I saw her lips form the word, ‘Maggie...’ ... I used the knife. I saved a child. I won a war. God forgive me. (Butcher *CH* 420)

because he would never forgive himself for performing that horrible act in which he killed his former lover, his daughter’s mother, in order to put an end to the war; this action, more than any other, establishes Harry Dresden as completely dedicated to fight the good fight, to never flinch from what must be done in order to keep evil from claiming victory. This egregious act of murder that Dresden must commit to secure a future for his family and rid the world of Red Court vampires is something Gandalf could never consider; Gandalf would never harm a member of the Fellowship, for any cause.

Yet consider Dresden’s actions: he kills a former lover and still the narrative focuses on Dresden’s actions, his own pain and the consequences for him alone. Dresden

assumes guilt because he has “near monopoly on agency [which] leads to an overlarge sense of responsibility on the part of the manpained hero, guilt becomes an important element of his characterization. Characters close to him suffer and die, either as a result of his actions, or of his inaction” (Óladóttir 15). The quote above is only one of many situations in which this phenomenon is clear throughout Butcher’s novels. Perhaps the most illuminating example of manpain within Butcher’s novels can be found in *Small Favor* when Dresden assumes guilt over Michael’s injuries despite the fact that it was through Michael’s own choice to help that he got hurt.

It is important to state that Gandalf does not fit this category. He is part of a group collective of protagonists that work in unison toward a single goal without exhibiting monopoly on agency. While Gandalf does exhibit regret and pain throughout the narrative, it can not be stated that as soon as the wizard exhibits such feelings, he suddenly assumes agency and becomes the structural focalizer of the narrative through which the reader experiences the Fellowship’s struggle to overcome Sauron.

### **3.4 Of Wit and Wisdom**

What becomes readily apparent throughout the course of *Merlin: or, the Early History of King Arthur: a Prose Romance* is that the wizard’s arcane powers are not his principal virtue, nor should not they ever be considered as such. It is only through the use of his wit and wisdom that he manages to fulfil what he considers the best course of action in order to unite a nation torn to pieces by war. It is this attribute and merit by which wizards should be judged, not their magical prowess or appearance. Dresden and Gandalf are inarguably as different in their use of power and intellect as they are in their morality, regardless of the fact that they are both struggling to overcome evil within their respective worlds. Gandalf’s reticence to use magic or assert his power without considerable provocation, or when protecting others, would seem strange until one realizes that he is not only a wizard, that his prime directive is connected with Middle-earth and he must maintain his spiritual balance, that it is imperative that he not harm inhabitants of Middle-earth which are a vital part of its balance unless absolutely necessary. Whether one ascribes the role of an angel returned from the dead or a spirit who holds the directive to assist in the battle against evil to Gandalf is of little import: he is a wizard, in the fullest sense. He is a learned intellectual, a wise man who ultimately uses his knowledge and instincts to guide his compatriots to victory without compromising his own morals. Not so



with Dresden and his constant use of magic in order to pursue his, or a paying client's, interests. Although he can not be said to be lacking intellectually, he does at times suspend the use of wisdom in order to opt for a more forceful, almost brutish, way to succeed in what amounts to his only purpose; to keep evil at bay, whatever the cost. Moreover, Dresden does not evince the kind of intellectual gift one usually would associate with wisdom, such as is displayed by Gandalf, but rather wit; his keen analytical sense of situational development and his innate ability to quickly grasp how to react correctly would all suggest that Dresden is a character primed for action rather than the careful, deliberate planning and manipulation of others. Magic is so everyday, so commonplace, in the life of Dresden that it has become interwoven with his character; because of this constant use, it does, however, diminish its spectacularity and wonder which is generally associated with spells being cast.

It has been stated that Gandalf's key characteristic is his immense wisdom and knowledge about Middle-earth, its inhabitants and how he actively uses his intellect to assist, advise and guide other characters in *The Lord of the Rings* to reach the right decisions or perform such actions Gandalf considers imperative to occur. This should be considered the hallmark of a traditional wizard and is reminiscent of the great Merlin, advisor to King Uther and Arthur Pendragon, who according to legends used his wisdom and foresight to unify a kingdom and secure a rightful rule for the land. Similarly, Gandalf does advise royalty in *The Lord of the Rings*, and moreover, shares his wisdom with those who seek it. It is arguably Gandalf's greatest gift to those whom he cares for and looks after to share his knowledge; what Gandalf considers to be his prime duty to Middle-earth implies that he is fundamentally a caretaker of its inhabitants and applies his intellectual gifts in order to ensure their safety and wellbeing without seeking power for himself, a directive which becomes apparent when Gandalf tells Denethor that

the rule of no realm is mine ... great or small. But all worthy things that are in peril as the world now stands, those are my care. And for my part, I shall not wholly fail of my task, though Gondor should perish, if anything passes through this night that can still grow fair or bear fruit and flower again in days to come. For I am also a steward. Did you not know? (Tolkien *ROTK* 992)

and moreover, it is stated that while Denethor seems wise and powerful, it is Gandalf who “had the greater power and the deeper wisdom, and a majesty that was veiled” which underlines that while the wisdom of humans can be an important factor, it pales in comparison with Gandalf’s intellect and wisdom (Tolkien *ROTK* 990). It is also important to note on this subject that it is through guidance, advice and patience that Gandalf operates in the best interests of the inhabitants of Middle-earth, without expecting any sort of remuneration except perhaps to enjoy some Longleaf every once in a while in good company.

Ironically, Dresden’s temperament and personality as presented by Butcher fits perfectly into one of Tolkien’s better known quotations from *The Lord of the Rings*: “[d]o not meddle in the affairs of Wizards, for they are subtle and quick to anger” (Tolkien *FOTR* 110). Although Dresden’s anger is seemingly omnipresent and explosively dangerous to his enemies, it is the subtlety that is his true strength. The mark of his intellectual prowess is definitely how subtle and cunning Dresden can be. Whether he is dealing with human criminals such as Marcone or with notoriously evasive and underhanded Faerie, Dresden continuously shows that his wit is the crucial characteristic without which he would certainly be dead.

## 4 Conclusion

Wizards are a crucial feature of these works and the fantasy genre in general, wielding power and influence and dominating the intellectual aspects of their respective storylines. To imagine fantasy literature without its famous wizards is quite impossible, perhaps especially during recent years in which there has been a veritable explosion of novels that has delivered a plethora of new practitioners of magic that spellbinds readers. Nevertheless, there are two characters to be found in modern literature that should be considered exceptional examples of wizardry, namely Tolkien's Gandalf and Butcher's Harry Dresden.

This thesis has demonstrated that Gandalf is a spiritual being whose directive enables him to use magic sparingly to the betterment of Middle-earth's inhabitants and that Dresden uses magic to such an extent that it has essentially become a part of his physique, just as normal as flexing a muscle. Gandalf's use of magic is only found in situations in which he is forced to resort to its use while Dresden uses it indiscriminately in order to further his own needs. The wisdom of wizards throughout the course of the novels, as discussed in this thesis, is a critical characteristic. It is what defines them, far more than being able to use magic. The most startling contrast of the two wizards that is covered in this text is how they use their intellect, most notably how Dresden uses his cunning and wit in order to navigate the morally ambiguous and fluctuating situations in which he is placed while Gandalf loyally follows the directive that the Valar imposed on his spirit, to advise Middle-earth's inhabitants and share his vast knowledge and experience to defeat Sauron and his minions.

It has been established that Dresden will not hesitate that to do that which must be done in order to overcome. If Middle-earth's morality were similar to the Dresdenverse, Gandalf would most likely have taken the Ring from Frodo in the Shire and proceeded to use its power against Sauron, despite its evil origins and bloody legacy. This, more than anything, crystallizes the two different moralities between the two wizards and also allows for significant insight into their respective worlds. Whereas Middle-earth has only to deal with a narrow spectrum of good and evil, i.e. there is evil and there is good without much of a middle ground, the Dresdenverse asserts a much broader range of morality within its

reality. What would be construed as a clearly evil action, such as murder, within Middle-earth can only be viewed as a horrible necessity performed without malice, in order to stop a war which had claimed a significant amount of lives. Conversely, this means that the implicit trust which Gandalf can and does have in his Fellowship in that it will always struggle against Sauron and the forces of evil is something which Dresden can not extend to everyone whom he must sometimes rely on in order to reach his goals.

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